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CNIA Powwow celebrates, educates

Summary: More than 55 dancers in full regalia and 14 drums gathered during the 22nd annual Circle of Nations Indian Association (CNIA) Powwow held at the University of Minnesota, Morris March 25.

(March 30, 2006)-More than 55 dancers in full regalia and 14 drums gathered during the 22nd annual Circle of Nations Indian Association (CNIA) Powwow held at the University of Minnesota, Morris March 25. The event culminated the 33rd annual World Touch Heritage Week celebration at UMM. Northern Wind with UMM alumnus Gabe Desrosiers as the lead from the NorthWest Angle Reserve in Ontario, Canada, and the Buffalo Lake Singers with Gary HolyBull from Sisseton, S.D. were the host drums. Other drums included Young Guns, Leech Lake Nation, Mission Lake, Prairie Wind, Lil Earth, Red Storm, and Iyakapta. The event also included a drum contest and the selection of the second Miss CNIA-UMM, Marissa Mountain from the Upper Sioux Community.

"The Powwow is a time to gather and celebrate our culture as well as to offer an educational opportunity for others," said Linsey McMurrin, president of the CNIA and a member of the Leech Lake Anishanabe. Nearly 25 student members of the CNIA now coordinate the event, which each year has welcomed dancers of all ages from Minnesota, the Dakotas and beyond. The event is held annually and is free and open to the public.

UMM faculty members Julie Pelletier, anthropology, and Becca Gercken-Hawkins, English, were honored with star quilts "because of their contributions to the American Indian student community and specifically their diligent work on creating a Native American concentration major in the anthropology discipline," said event co-coordinator and UMM senior Dionne Crawford. "Star quilts were presented because they are significant nationwide as an honoring blanket by many groups of Native Americans. Years ago, a young woman had a dream about a healing blanket with a star on it, which is now depicted on our modern day star quilt. A song was sung in their honor, people shook their hands, told them thank you and danced behind them in support of their work." Crawford is a social science major from Sisseton, S.D. and is a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate.

"The star quilts are what the Dakota, Lakota, and other Plains people now use as an honorary gift, where in the past it might have been a buffalo robe," added Pelletier. "The Chippewa (Ojibwa) and other Woodland tribes like mine are more likely to give Pendleton wool blankets. Indians tend to celebrate important events in their lives by giving gifts instead of receiving gifts. Families often gather blankets and other gifts for a year before a major event, like graduation, a naming ceremony, wedding or the anniversary of a loved one's death. They always include a candy give-away for the little ones by pouring candy onto a blanket, which the kids then gather up."

Gabe Desrosiers was also the arena director, Danny Seaboy from the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate was the emcee, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Vietnam Veterans were the color guard, UMM Dakota language instructor Clifford Canku was the spiritual adviser and head singing judges were UMM students Leo Baker and Ronnie WhiteMountain.

"There were many people who helped make the Powwow a success," added Crawford, "but I would like to mention Ron Kubik (UMM Media Services staff) who donated hours of his own time to operate the sound system. In addition, the

UMM Black Student Union (BSU) and Imani student organizations donated money, and BSU members helped to clean up following the event." Other contributors for the event were the Chancellor's office, the Office of Student Activities, Gercken-Hawkins, alumna Dianne Desrosiers, and students Ed Isburg, Rose Jones and Estella Claymore who helped judge the Miss CNIA-UMM contest.

Photo: Kinew Desrosiers (left), outgoing Miss CNIA-UMM, prepares for the grand entry during the March 25 Powwow. She is assisted by her mother Diane, who, along with her husband, Gabe, are UMM alumni from Browns Valley. [photo by Brian Williams, Morris Sun Tribune]

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