

Parents Carry on Culture

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JOM Parents Carry on Culture for their Children

By: Avis Ballard, JOM Coordinator

The first Saturday of April brought unexpected warmth and sunshine to Osage county and the community. Inside a small Skiatook School gymnasium it also brought a crowd and flurry of activity as parents struggled to dress their children in traditional Native regalia for the 5th Annual Skiatook JOM Powwow. Young mothers wrapped shawls around their little girls and led them into the arena for a lesson in round-dancing. Other adults visited as children chased each other in open areas with laughter and flushed cheeks.

Matt Wynn, President of Skiatook JOM, made the important decisions as head of the powwow committee and event organizer. "I will ask the Chief to speak after the crowning of the princess and her special is over," he decided while looking at the busy agenda. The man in question was Chief Jim Gray of the Osage Nation. The JOM Committee felt pleased to have the tribal leader as guest speaker at their special occasion.

The powwow continued as young dancers competed in the arena as their families looked on proudly. The junior and teen dancers looked very different in size and maturity; however, they share a common bond as JOM students at the public schools in the surrounding area. They also share a history of struggle to become educated in mainstream society without losing their culture as Native people.

It is a constant battle well-known in JOM organizations across the nation. Parents with good intentions and high hopes for their children run parent committees and plan events with little help and no compensation other than quality time with their young people. Family is the most important aspect of the Johnson O'Malley Program and can be hard to explain to outsiders who only think of school supplies whenever they hear any discussion of JOM.

The following afternoon brought cloudy skies and cold wind as another JOM event began at the Wakon Iron Hall in Pawhuska's Indian Village. Families from Pawhuska and Hominy gathered for the 2nd Annual "Battle of the Osage" JOM Hand Game Challenge.

During this event, Asa Cunningham, President of Pawhuska JOM, facilitated and also led the students to learn first-hand how to run a traditional Osage Handgame. Tristan McCartney, 8 years old, acted as M.C and John Bighorse Jr., 11 years old, kept score of the games won and lost between the two teams.

"I need some guessers now to come up here and help us out," Tristan announced to the crowd. He kept up a running commentary and made the audience laugh and feel comfortable throughout the fun-filled afternoon. In between hand game sets the students competed in pop-

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drinking and potato dance contests. Hominy JOM won the day as the hand game challenge came to an end and the hungry participants lined up for a spaghetti and lasagna dinner.

"I want to thank everyone for coming out today and also the Hominy JOM committee for responding to our challenge," Asa stated in her closing address. She continued by explaining the difficulties her parents faced to attend and organize the event.