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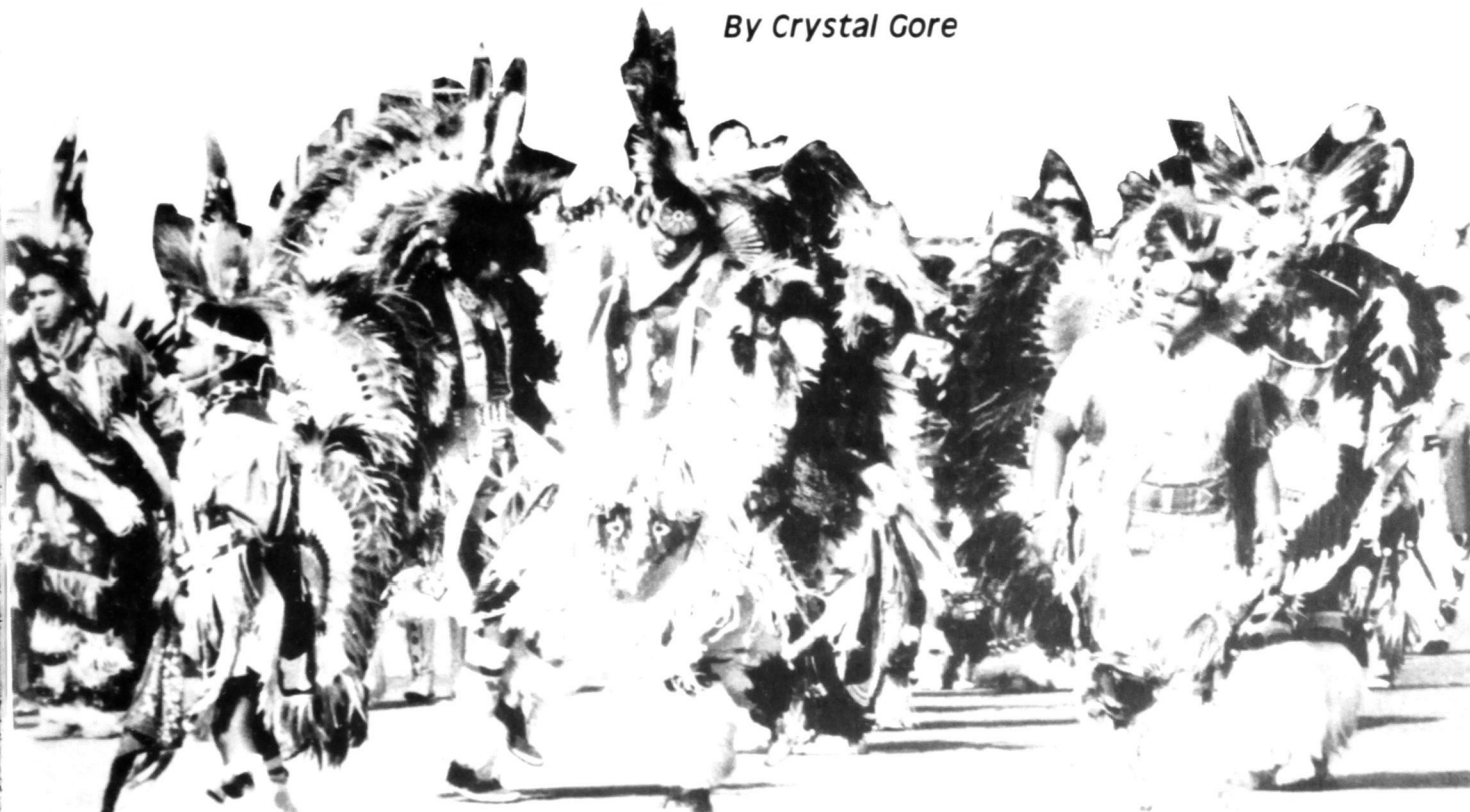
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# THE AMERICAN INDIAN EXPOSITION

*By Crystal Gore*



Right here in Western Oklahoma is one of the top-ten tourist attractions in the nation, the American Indian Exposition. Not only is it in the top-ten tourist attractions; it is the only Indian exposition held in the United States.

The fair was started in 1935 under the laws of the state of Oklahoma by the Plains Indians. The exposition is a non-profit organization, totally Indian owned and operated, headquartered in Anadarko. It is currently made up of seventeen tribes including Apache, Kiowa, and Wichita. The main purpose is to perpetuate Indian arts and crafts and to preserve their cultural heritage. The fair is organized by the Board of Directors consisting of a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and one representative from each tribe. Also, each tribe elects a princess.

Many events take place during the fair, showing the American Indian's unique skills, dance ceremonies, and customs. A large parade down Main Street of Anadarko kicks off the annual exposition. Indians dress in their traditional tribal regalia for the parade.

Many area marching bands participate along with Indian dancers. According to Robyn Hawkins, a half-Kiowa who has attended the fair for several years, "The most entertaining part of the parade is seeing the Indian of the Year." The honorees, all part Indian, have included Tonto, the Lone Ranger's right-hand man, Crystal Gayle, and Willie Nelson. The parade is only the beginning of the week-long fair as many other events are scheduled.

Dog and horse races are held every afternoon at the grandstand. Robyn stated, "It's a great deal of fun to participate in this event. No, I don't mean to actually participate with the dogs and horses but to lay a few dollars down and come out with a ton of money." On the other hand, dog and horse races are not for everyone, but there's always something else to do for entertainment.

The Baldwin Exhibit Building houses hand-crafted artwork and jewelry by popular Indian artists from all over the state of Oklahoma. Robyn stated that the artwork and jewelry are all reasonably priced. People



Silversmith Bruce Caesar of Anadarko crafts silver jewelry creations.

tend to buy a little something to take back home as a souvenir of the Indian fair.

The main attraction for the younger generation is the Midway. Many carnival rides are in operation for the more daring who don't mind a little tickle in the tummy. For those who are not too big on the rides, there are quite a few games of chance to test their skills and win a prize.

The grown-ups can enjoy the togetherness of the American Indian's past life. There are approximately 570 camps set up for the week, with accommodations ranging from tepees to motor homes. Here they are able to show their children and tourists their heritage and cultures of the olden days. They visit with their people and friends whom they may not see but once a year.

The grand finale is an event which represents the

Native American quite well. This event is called the dance pageant. The pageant is held nightly, and it features men, women, and children from many different tribes in Oklahoma competing against one another for large amounts of money. The competition is judged on traditional tribal costumes and best display of various dances. Gourd, war, and straight dancing are some of the dances performed, and the costumes consist of velvet, shawl, and buckskin dress.

The true meaning of the American Indian Exposition seen through the viewpoints of Robyn Hawkins and Janelle Sanchez, Robyn's mother, is "an annual Indian get-together keeping our culture alive and making sure there are many of us each year. And honestly to us there aren't many American Indians today." The Exposition shows the non-Indian people that Indians are human too. Indians aren't savages as they are portrayed to be in the old Western movies. It's possible that non-Indians find a certain respect for Indians by attending Indian events such as the Exposition.

These are just a few of the events held each year during the fair. The events must be a great deal of fun as approximately 30,000 people from all over the world attend. Many people of all races plan their vacations to coincide with the American Indian Exposition. ●

*CRYSTAL GORE of Mountain View was a student in one of SOSU Professor Con Hood's English Composition classes at the time this article was accepted for publication.*

**All of the photos were provided by the ANA-DARKO DAILY NEWS**



The American Indian Exposition hosts horse and greyhound racing each afternoon during Exposition week



*Indian princesses wait for their entrance to the arena to participate in the original pageant **Sunrise to Sunset**.*



The Apache Fire Dancers perform the **Dance of the Mountain God** at the 57th annual American Indian Exposition.