Everyone has to pitch in

The National Indian Conference on Aging is held every two years in various U.S. CITIES. This year the conference was held in Spokane, WA. Past sites have included Nashville, TN, and Green Bay, WI.

The Minnesota Indian Council of Elders plans and conducts various fund raising events for two years prior to the conference. The proceeds from these fundraisers then be used to help elders and other individuals working in the field of aging to attend the national conference.

If you are interested in attending the next national conference on aging - you must assist at all fund raising events as follows:

- Donations
  Food - casseroles, salads, fry bread, meats, dessert or any food item on the planned menu.

- Bake Sale & White Elephant Sale - knick-knacks or books, no clothes please; cakes, pies, cookies, banana bread, etc.

- Cooking before event
  Working at the fundraiser - setting-up tables before event, serving food, awaiting on tables, selling bakery items, working at White Elephant Sale, collecting money for Bingo, cleaning-up after the event, etc.

- Promotion, posting fliers at various locations

It is not enough to simply come to the fundraisers and spend your money. You must actively participate in at least two out of three categories, of all of the above. Also, this does not include donating to the Pull-Tab Buckets. Each donation will be noted in a ledger to include item donated and/or time and the name of the individual.

In the past, we have had only a few individuals willing to donate not only items, but, most important, their time as well. We are asking for more elders to actively participate in each fundraising event. We would like to build up enough money to take as many elders as possible to the next conference.

Elders - We Need YOUR Help.

Also, the Leech Lake Tribal Council/Bingo Palace has kindly donated a cook shack at the Pow-wow Grounds to MICOE & LLENFAC. Sometime next spring, we will be requesting volunteers to work in shifts at each pow-wow. Keep this in mind and plan on helping next spring. If you are interested in attending the next conference and want to be informed of all fundraising events, please notify one of the following to have your name put on a mailing list:

Helen Cummings, MICOE President
218/335-8315
Joseph James, Sr., MICOE Vice-Prev
218/335-8433
Lucilla Seeleye, MICOE Secretary
218/335-8585
Ardith Morrow, MICOE Promotions
218/335-8585

I would like to do all of this again. I'm looking forward to the next conference. Richard also enjoyed himself - mostly teasing Josie Simons. Josie was impressed by the really old traditional elders in attendance and would have liked to have taken their pictures. She liked the film, "Legacy," and related to the issues brought forward and can relate them to her line of work such as transportation, health care, homemaker/chore services, and the isolation of Indian communities. Problems stated are historical and don't seem to get solved. I would like to see something positive come out of this conference and some of these problems get solved for the betterment of all Indian elders. Richard enjoyed Bingo. We are willing to work hard for the next trip.

Some comments by a few who attended the conference...

Joseph James, Sr.: Overall impression of conference - good speakers, lots of our own people giving talks, strong opinions on what an Indian elder needs, they didn't mince words regarding health and transportation and health care issues. Criticism - not enough time allotted to general assembly. Many elders were turned away who didn't get to speak - everyone was disappointed by this. Workshops and Sessions were very well presented. One disappointment was that our delegate didn't get elected. Didn't attend the traditional feed because the line was too long. Also, tired of walking by then. Didn't like the one workshop on Title VI resources the people who got up to speak didn't exactly speak on Title VI - more on their own pet peeves. He thinks the Hostess/Moderator should have intervened and got the session back on track. He enjoyed the trip overall. However, he suggests that on our next trip we take our time and enjoy the scenery more. Everyone was too tired each night because we really pushed ourselves. We didn't take time to browse, but in general it was still a good trip. Also, the registration was too confusing, but it straightened itself out after awhile. Joe would especially like to thank Fig and the Tribal Council for letting us have their vans. Too often, we complain when our leaders don't do something right and don't thank them enough when they do something to help out. Joe is willing to do another trip and is even looking forward to it.

Rose James: Trip was fun - accommodations were okay. She feels conferences didn't really take in all Indian nations. Mostly concentrated on Northwest Tribes. She's still mad at Dave Baldridge because of the misunderstanding in Joe's membership. He offered to help us organize and get a local chapter started - we are already organized and have many elders. She, too, was disappointed in the Caucus. It was too bad the Minnesota vote was split. One of the sessions she attended she raised the concern of elders being discriminated against in housing practices because of age. Session moderator stated that HUD doesn't discriminate based on age, however, each Tribal Council has their own policy as to prioritizing applicants. Rose didn't find this answer satisfactory. She enjoyed the elders' testimony and felt they brought up good strong points. Bob Blancato was rude to break into one man's testimony and kept asking Lou Rock to repeat himself which she also thought was rude. Also, disappointed that Elizabeth Clinton didn't attend and didn't even think enough of us to send a letter of apology or explanation. Tipper Gore was courteous enough to send a letter.
Happy trails to us: our trip to Spokane

In two vans provided by the Leech Lake Tribe Council, a group of elders, one semi-senior and two children set off early Saturday morning, August 21st for Spokane WA. There they would attend the National Indian Conference on Aging. This trip was made possible by fundraising events sponsored by the Minnesota Indian Council of Elders, Leech Lake Chapter.

One little group included Richard and Josephine Dunn, Josie Simons, Ardith Morrow, Sheena Morrow, Helen Cummings, BJ Lausche, Edna Whitefeather, Joseph James, Sr., Rose James, Marion Horton, George Thompson, and Lorene Beaulieu.

Our first stop was in Moorhead to pick up Bonnie Anderson and her grandson, Michael. Bonnie is the Elderly Nutrition Director for the White Earth Reservation. Included in this stop was the first of many mistakes made by everyone at 5:30 a.m. Hardee's. Then it was time to “hit the road” again.

After several pit-stops, and one lunch break, we arrived in Miles City, MT to spend the night. Of course, first on the list was to eat dinner and then off to K-Mart for a little shopping break. We didn’t see much of Miles City. It was thundering, lightening, and quite gusty, so we didn’t venture far from the motel.

Our leader, Joe James, told us to be ready to go by 6:30 the next morning and left a wake-up call for everyone at 5:30 a.m. However, impatient George called everyone at 5 a.m. the next morning! His excuse was that he was still on Minnesota time and thought it was 6 o’clock and everyone had overslept. A likely story! At 6 a.m., just about the whole group was ready to go, we were all milling around in the lobby in a state of sleepy confusion waiting for our leader, Joe. But George forgot to wake up Joe and his group when he was busy rousing everyone else. After Harrassing George, finally at 6:30 everyone had their act together and it was off to Spokane!

After many hours and miles on the road, we reached Spokane at approximately 7:30 p.m. But wouldn’t you know it - we were lost. Someone, again I won’t mention any names, drove off in our van confusingly stating that they knew the way to get to downtown Spokane. Of course - we got lost again. This time wasn’t so bad. We drove up a windy, beautiful mountain road with some breathtaking views of Spokane, spotted two deer which we couldn’t shoot because it was off the rez, stopped and took some pictures at the top of the mountain and then decided to ask for directions. Two very friendly Cho-mook-a-mon-queuays pointed down the mountain, said to take a right & then a left and then another right, turn left at the stop sign, and there we would be. I don’t know where “there” was, but we found downtown Spokane. Of course, right away we had to stop and eat - first things first. Richard insisted he had to have seven pancakes and oatmeal with bacon grease for breakfast, fortunately “The Shack” was up to his request. The rest of us settled for the standard breakfast fare of eggs, toast, and bacon.

The driver, Ardith, fired herself, and a city driver was appointed. We drove around aimlessly for awhile wondering where the Sheraton was - and I want to state this for the official record - Richard Dunn is an excellent backseat driver! We spotted the Sheraton in a pretty, picturesque setting and pulled into the parking lot. We were very excited to see some other Shinobs loitering around - and knew for sure we had the right place. We guess it didn’t take them as long to eat oatmeal and bacon grease. They excitedly told us they had found an “all you can eat” buffet and the food was great. We were quite happy to receive this bit of information as we were quite concerned about where to have breakfast the next morning. Joe’s wife, Rose, told us Joe knows where every “all you can eat” buffets are from the east coast to the west coast and between Canada and Mexico. I knew right then and there, that we had the right leader.

Craft booths already were in the process of being set up at conference headquarters, so we proceeded to view the craft items from the various tribes. I snatched some cute, little t-shirts off one table before someone else could grab them, paid for them, and proceeded eagerly on to the next craft table. We all purchased some t-shirts and other little trinkets and then decided to get registered for the conference.

Registration! What a confused mess! There was a bit of a mix-up regarding Joe James’ registration. Joe and Rose were threatening to call the whole thing off and start back for Minnesota. Helen, Edna, and I looked at each other in disbelief! Go right back? We had just arrived! All we could think of was that long, dusty, boring, ride so soon, again. I spotted Dave Baldrige, NICOA Executive Director, yanked his long black & silver pony tail (just kidding), and explained our situation to him. Fortunately, Dave straightened out the registration, apologized to Joe and Rose and the rest of us breathed a sigh of relief.

We ran into some other friends from Minnesota during registration - Si Howard and his daughter and granddaughter, Lou Rock from the Twin Cities, a group of Mille Lacs elders including Marge Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, and Melanie Benjamin, and some Red Lakers. Very nice to see Minnesota so well represented.

Of course, Josie Simons signed up for the Bingo Bus right away. She even won that evening - ‘way to go, Josie. She even saved her winning Bingo card to show off. She’s just dying for someone to ask her if they can see it.

At the reception that evening for conference atttendees, a very fun game naming TV commercials was held. Richard, Josephine Dunn and Ardith and Sheena were in the winning group. We received mugs from The Museum at Warm Springs and some hats. It was heated eagerly by hands around and seeing all the Indian elders smiling and enjoying themselves. I think that our Indian elders are the most beautiful group of seniors you could ever see. Many of the Navajos were wearing their traditional dress with lots of silver and turquoise jewelry. I also spotted many women wearing clothing with Indian designs and prints which were quite beautiful.

The next morning, Thursday, after a delicious, loaded with calories breakfast at
The “All You Can Eat” buffet, we headed out for the conference. Oh yeah, Don Robinson, our Leech Lake ENP Director, joined our little group at this time.

The Opening Ceremony started with a prayer and a song. To the accompaniment of drums, U.S. Flags, Eagle Staffs, and various Indian nation flags were carried into the auditorium by the Pacific Northwest Indian Veterans Association and Color Guard. This was a very impressive, dignified occasion. The sight of Indian Veterans and the Eagle Staff moved members of the audience to tears.

Fernando Torres-Gil spoke on Indian Aging in the 90s and Charles Reed gave a brief overview on Washington’s Aging Services.

A highlight of the morning was a preview of the NICOA Video, “Legacy.” The Indian Area Agency on Aging has purchased this video for any agency interested in viewing it. It vividly depicts the contrast between Title III Nutrition sites and the Title VI Nutrition Sites. Our Indian elders are receiving fewer services on nutrition sites because of the lack of Title VI monies. This film makes one weep at some of the living conditions our elders have to endure. Yet, it fills one with pride because their happy, good spirits can be seen and their enjoyment of life in spite of what others see as a lack of “material” wealth. You can see that our seniors are wealthy beyond words in the ways that count.

The afternoon was broken into two Key Sessions and five Elder Sessions. I attended the session “Physical and Mental Changes -- how should it feel to grow old?” where I found out my memory lapses are perfectly normal -- just part of the aging process. Now, if I can only convince my family of this.

There were so many conference attendees, approximately 2,000 -- that it was difficult to find seating in the sessions. However, most of us found space in both afternoon sessions and gained from our attendance.

A “Traditional Feast” hosted by the Northwest Tribes was held at the Riverfront Park. This feast was most excellent -- a wide variety of fresh fruit and berries, baked potatoes, corn on the cob, halibut, salmon, clams, oysters, elkburgers, deer meat, and even elk jerky which was way delicious.

After the feast we all walked back to the hotel for a Traditional Fashion Show. Helen Cummings modeled a traditional Chippewa Tribal dress. We were all proud to have a ‘Minnesota Chip’ participate in this event in which Helen looked lovely.

Regional Caucuses were held that evening to elect Board Members from the 12 BIS Regions to be seated on the NICOA Board. Nominees from the Minneapolis area included Helen Cummings, Wendell McLester, and Alberta Norris. Wendell McLester won the seat for another two years. Oh well, we will try again in another two years to get our representative seated on the Board.

Helen and Alberta both presented themselves well and demonstrated a knowledge of Indian concerns and issues and answered questions intelligently and thoroughly. We were simply outnumbered in voting by the number of elders Wisconsin had attending the conference.

Friday morning’s general session was very impressive. Bob Blancto, Director of the White House Conference on Aging, opened up the floor to questions and comments from the audience. And did our seniors ever get up and make their opinions known - in very strong language! Mr. Blancto even tried at one point to interrupt an Indian elder’s testimony and was told, in a very strong manner, that in Indian Country when an Elder is speaking you listen and keep your comments to yourself until the elder is finished. This is only right and respectful. Concerns were expressed regarding cutbacks in Indian Health Service, quality of health care, need for transportation, more money for Title VI budgets, homemakers and chore services. One elderly Indian woman gave such strong testimony. She stated that health care is not a privilege for Indianpeople; it is a right we have in exchange for our lands taken from us by the white people. She reminded Mr. Blancto of the special trust status between the federal government and Indian tribes, that Indian tribes were sovereign nations and have the right to be treated as such. She ended with “If President Clinton were here, I would tell him off, too!” She received much applause. The only draw-back was the shortness of time allotted for audience participation. Many elders were waiting to give their testimony and were unable to do so. It was great to see and hear our Indian elders present themselves and their opinions and concerns in such a strong manner. For too long, we have been a silent people.

That evening, Friday, we attended the Spokane Pow-wow. We enjoyed ourselves watching the “Sneak Dance,” “the Shake,” and a dance demonstration by the young people (6 years and under). These are our future championship dancers and they certainly “strutted” their stuff out there - made our hearts soar like an Eagle in pride. Our only regret was that we would be leaving the next day and would be unable to attend more of the pow-wow. There were many craft tables there with beautiful traditional beadwork, earrings, purses, moccasins, dreamcatchers...It “boogled” my mind trying to decide what to spend my money on.

Of course, Richard Dunn and Josie Simons deserted us for Bingo that evening. This time, it was Richard’s turn to win. Due to his “big bucks,” Richard said he would treat everyone in our group to seven Pancakes and Oatmeal and Bacon Greese the next morning.

Saturday and Sunday were long days on the road. We enjoyed shopping at the $10,000 Silver Dollar tourist trap in Montana. After viewing many unique, handcrafted Indiany items at the pow-wow, we now previewed Japanese Indian crafts. Oh well, if anyone can’t appreciate the difference between the genuine item and the ‘fake’ by now, they deserve to get ripped off.

We didn’t eat as much on the journey home. It was the consensus that everyone looked a few pounds heavier. A good time was had by all, but, was it ever wonderful to get back home again.

Mi-Gwitch to the Leech Lk Tribal Council for providing the vans that made this trip possible.

by Ardith Morrow
Elder Fest '94

Are you 55 years or older??

Join us for Elder Fest '94

Lots of Fun & Games: Earn Prizes

* Health Checks       * Speakers

* Activities: Make you own First Aid Kit & Winter Survival Kit

* Lunch & Transportation Provided

* Where & When: 9:30am - 2pm

Sept 16, 1994: Pike Bay Town Hall for persons from Cass Lake, Onigum and Squaw Point Areas

Sept 23, 1994: Ball Club New Community Center for persons from Squaw Lake, Ball Club, Inger, Bena, & Sugar Point, etc., Areas (Please attend only one location)

Visit all booths & get a chance at Grand Prizes at end of the Fest (about 2 pm)

See You There!!