



David Hansen ♦ Daily News staff photos

Members of various tribes gather Saturday during a powwow in Tiverton. The two-day 'Gathering of Nations' also included a black powder shoot held at the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club.



Margaret 'Lady Hawk' Higgins of Portsmouth practices her hawk throw during Saturday's powwow.

'Gathering of Nations'

Groups hold event following traditions of 1800s

By Marcia Pobeznik
Daily News correspondent

TIVERTON — Twice during the weekend, the Native Americans taking part in a powwow and the mountain men taking part in a black powder shoot got together to renew a bond and carry on traditions that began nearly 200 years ago.

"Without the Native Americans, a lot of mountain men wouldn't have survived," said Paul Higgins of Portsmouth, who helped organize the "Gathering of Nations" that was held Saturday and Sunday at the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club.

The mountain men of the early 1800s were fur trappers who regularly traded with the Native Americans.

The mountain men at the weekend black powder shoot had a primitive encampment in a clearing in the woods at the club, while the powwow was held in a field at the top of the road.

The two "nations" got together on Saturday for a pipe ceremony and on Sunday for a blessing of the rifles.

Two chiefs, including Chief Truehart from Howley, Mass., who is a member of the Overhill Cherokee Indians of Tennessee, moved from one mountain man to the next as they stood in a circle near the encampment and said a prayer while holding each of their rifles. Moments ear-

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68-year-old Tiverton resident

lier, Chief Truehart's wife, Woman Bear Spirit, "smudged" the mountain men with smoldering incense. Holding a red tail hawk wing in one hand and an abalone shell in the other that held the smoldering mix of tobacco, sweet grass, sage, cedar and lavender, she fanned the smoke over them as they slowly turned.

"This is taking the negativity off everything and giving it to the creator," said Chief Truehart, who was wearing a full headdress of white feathers, a beaded belt, suede moccasins and a choker made from bone.

Allen Bagg of New York, whose torso was covered with three coyote pelts, had his primitive spears blessed.

Black powder shoots are held at the Rod and Gun Club four times a year, but this is the first time a powwow has been incorporated, Higgins said.



Roger 'Gray Fox' Desrosiers of Somerset, Mass., and the Dighton Indian Tribal Council tends to his duties as firekeeper during the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club's Gathering of Nations. For more photos, visit www.NewportDailyNews.com and click on 'Photo Gallery.'

GATHERING A5

LOCAL&STATE



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Capt. Ed Hebert of the Warren Federal Blues Rhode Island Militia fires at a target during a woods walk Saturday as part of the Tiverton Rod and Gun Club's 'Gathering of Nations.'

Gathering

Continued from A3

Michael VonVillas, 68, of Tiverton said he got hooked on black powder shooting and the primitive encampments a year ago.

"The camaraderie, the wilderness," VonVillas said of the allure of the black powder shoots. "It just embodies what our nation was.

"We live what they lived," he said of the mountain men of the early 1800s. "Even the coffee tastes better here."

"Some people say, 'you guys dress in funny clothes,'" Higgins said, but like any hobby, "it takes you out of reality for two days.

"There are no time clocks, no schedules to keep," he said. "The mountain men did what they had to do to survive."

The powwows are a way of life for some of the Native Americans that took part in the past weekend's events.

Chief Truehart said he travels to schools up and down the coast educating children and adults about tribal culture and traditions and sells jewelry to make a living.

His sister-in-law Windsong Silverfox Hodges of New York, a member of the Eastern Band Cherokee, and vice chief of the Intertribal Council of New England, said she spends nearly every weekend at a powwow.

"This is an intertribal gathering to teach, trade, pass down traditions and tell stories," Hodges said.

"The rule is if you touch something," she said, pointing to colorful belts and a talking stick, "you have to ask a question about it. We're a hands-on group. We prefer you touch it. If you

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PAUL HIGGINS

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feel it, you're going to remember it."

Talking sticks, she said, are used "to control the argument." The rule is that only one person can hold it at a time and that person is the only one who can talk. When that person has had his or her say, the stick is passed to the next person who has something to say and everyone else listens. Hodges said the talking sticks are popular with teachers and they've given many away at educational events.

Craftsmen lined the field where the drumming and dancing was held. Handmade moccasins, jewelry, drums, hides from bison, knife sheaths made from fur and leather and hand-carved walking sticks were for sale. John Kuehl from Templeton, Mass., made a 15-foot canoe by hand using birch bark and spruce roots.

"We stood in the mud up to our knees to dig the roots," said his wife, Joanne. Making the canoe was a lifelong dream of his, she said.

Chief Truehart said he used to make his bone and soapstone chokers and pipes by hand, using stone to sand them, but has now incorporated some modern technology into his craft making. "Thank God for power tools," he said.

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