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Tribal culture, customs on display

Elaine Ayala

Navajo, Sioux and Osage are expected. Kiowa, Cherokee and Lipan Apache are coming.

The United San Antonio Pow Wow, set for this weekend **at** San Antonio Shrine Auditorium, will draw members of 35 tribal nations from all over **the** country.

The 16th-annual event will showcase **American** Indian arts, crafts, foods, drumming and dancing.

While such gatherings have ancient roots, historians say powwow origins are contemporary.

Clyde Ellis, co-editor of **the** book **◆**Pow Wow**◆** and a historian **at** Elon University **in** North Carolina, said **the** 20th-century phenomenon grew out of cultural restrictions on reservations imposed by federal authorities bent on assimilating tribal peoples.

From **the** late 1800s through **the** 1930s, Ellis said **the** government banned dancing, **in** particular, as a spiritual expression.

◆Religious rituals and all kinds of dancing offended federal policymakers, who thought they were wasteful and pagan,**◆** he said. **◆**They were especially concerned children not attend.**◆**

Ellis said that instead of ending such traditions, people merely took them off **the** reservation, on **the** road and into towns.

In becoming more public, he said they also became **◆**more secular and performative.**◆**

After World Wars I and II, **the** powwow was one of **the** ways Indian veterans were welcomed home.

◆It became a way for people to combine contemporary experiences with old values,**◆** Ellis said. **◆**They reminded people of their tribal identity.**◆**

Today, they're a way for **Indians** to share customs with each another and non-**Indians**.

The San Antonio powwow's newest addition will be **the** Native **American** Women Warriors color guard, military veterans from diverse tribes who will carry flags **at the** main entry.

Active duty, retired and reservist, they wear their military insignia on traditional healing garments called jingle dresses, said **the** group's vice president, Julia Kelly.

◆Our regalia is meant to bring healing to **the** nation, to our tribal nations and to our veterans,**◆** she said.

The group was part of inaugural festivities last month **in** Washington, and has become so popular it now has an auxiliary unit that includes male members, Kelly said.

Tim Tall Chief of **the** Osage Nation will be **the** master of ceremonies again this year, and Bill Takes Horse, a Crow, will serve as arena director.

This year's powwow will be dedicated to **the** late Michael Gonzales, a Comanche artisan known for his moccasin, buckskin and bead work, said Erwin De Luna, president of **the** United San Antonio Pow Wow.

Gonzales, who died last year, was a powwow founder, a deputy director of **the** San Antonio River Authority and a tribal lands biologist, De Luna said.

He said powwows have become important cultural events for urban **Indians**.

◆ Many of us have never lived on a reservation, ◆ De Luna said. ◆ **The** powwow is where we celebrate our history, traditions and our customs and honor those before us. ◆

The American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, established by **the** Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation **in** San Antonio, is a sponsor of **the** free event.

eayala@express-news.net

Twitter: @ElaineAyala

FROM GRAPHIC:

The United San Antonio Pow Wow

Where: San Antonio Shrine Auditorium **at** 901 N. Loop 1604 West

When: Saturday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. (Grand entries 1 and 7 p.m.)

Sunday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Native **American** Church service 9:30 a.m.; grand entry 12:30 p.m.)
