

# YOUNG NATIVES TAKE TO NATIVE DANCING

## Special Programs Have Music, Language, Arts



**TRAVELING LUNCH**—Brenda Parker and Celena Eagleman, out of costume, eat lunch at the Fairbanks Native Community Center. During

the three day convention the 19 dancers and singers boarded at local homes, were coordinated through the Center.



**CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION**—Demonstrating in Eskimo dance class here are Johnny and Jimmy Evak, Debbie Jessop, Cheryl Gallahorn

and Gilbert Schaeffer. Most Kotzebue students arrive at school half an hour or more early to attend dance classes.



**INDIAN REGALIA**—Rocky Boy Chippewa Cree Dancer Charlotte Wolfchild dons her dance regalia before a performance at the Traveler's

Inn in Fairbanks. Her elaborate beadwork was done by her mother.

The rash of programs in Alaskan schools to introduce Eskimo and Indian children to the culture of their forefathers is equaled or surpassed by programs on Indian Reservations in the lower 48 which combine standard American curricula with special programs in Indian language, music, dance, crafts and art.

This year, the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Chippewa Cree Tribe of Rocky Boy Reservation of Montana are running a cultural exchange program. In October, AFN members attending the Federation's annual convention were treated to a performance by the prize winning Chippewa Cree Indian Tribal Children's Dancing and Singing team.

Nineteen young Montana Indian children, ranging in age from eight to fourteen, traveled to Fairbanks to perform for the AFN.

Later in the year, Eskimo children from the Eskimo dance program in Kotzebue plan to tour Montana, North Dakota, Florida and other States. So far, funding has not been obtained.

The Children's Dance Team at Rocky Boy grew out of a movement in 1969 when the Chippewa-Cree there decided to form their own public school district.

As a traditional tribe, Rocky Boy residents found their children severely penalized by the public school's system of not

teaching school topics till children learned English.

In 1955, seventy-five per cent of the students from the reservation entered school able to communicate only in the verbal and written Cree language. Few were able to successfully complete high school.

After years of meeting resistance from the boards of local schools to any type of bicultural or cultural program, the Chippewa Cree decided to form their own Public School District. Bicultural and bilingual programs were a number one priority.

As part of an extensive program in traditional tribal dances and American Indian music, several dancing and singing troops were formed. In the state of Montana, the children competed and won against adult dance groups.

Their costumes, painstakingly hand made and decorated by parents, were estimated to cost \$500 to \$1500 a piece.

In Kotzebue, children at the school have recently started to learn the Eskimo songs and dances of their forefathers. The program has brought enthusiastic participation from the children and their parents.

In the morning, the Kotzebue school is transformed by the sounds of Eskimo drums.

Hopefully, funding will become available to send these children down to the lower 48, to perform at stateside Indian conventions, schools, celebrations.

*Photos by:*  
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**KOTZEBUE DANCER**—Cheryl Gallahorn demonstrates the Eskimo dancing she has been learning this year through a special class offered at her school. The dancers are being groomed to form a performing team which may travel to the lower 48.