

Reawakening of Native Culture Seen

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"I think there's been a reawakening of culture among our people, a new appreciation of the traditions of the native people," says Mrs. Clydia Nahwooksy.

Mrs. Nahwooksy, an Oklahoma Cherokee, directs a newly developed program in Indian Awareness at the Smithsonian Institution Division of Performing Arts.

She is in Alaska this week recruiting help and information for the Indian section of the Institution's annual Festival of American Folklife, held during the first week of July on the Washington Mall in front of the nation's capitol.

Each year, the Festival features the culture of the Indians of a different region, along with a state and an industry. This year, it will feature about 75 representatives of the culture of the Indians and Eskimos of the Northwest Coast and Alaska.

They will present the crafts, arts, songs, traditions, dances and history of their people—the living traditions that go on today as they did 100 years ago.

The task of presenting a program to accurately represent the traditions that live today is enormous. After three weeks in Washington and Oregon, speaking to Indian tribal leaders, art officials and state government, Mrs. Nahwooksy faces the tremendous diversity of Alaskan Native cultures.

Foremost in her mission, which is taking her from one end of the state to another, is finding an Alaskan who can coordinate the extensive research necessary—and arrange for recruitment and travel plans for 25 to 35 people.

These representatives, who will be invited to appear at the program in Washington, D.C. will receive travel expenses, lodging and a small honorarium.

Several members of the Festival will be invited to participate in traveling exhibitions to such places as Montreal during the summer.

During her two weeks in Alaska, Mrs. Nahwooksy has spoken to AFN leaders, Alaskan artists and craftsmen and other Alaskans with a serious knowledge of the arts and crafts of their people. She is also speaking to State officials.

Part of the purpose of her trip is to recruit funds for the Indian Awareness Program to offset the cost of the Festival and other activities of the program.

"Our aim is to present the Indian as we are today," she explained. Approximately 700,000 visitors passed through the 1970 Folklife Festival which featured the southern Plains Indian tribes. They received an introduction to the varied cul-

tures of these people—the music, food, dance, tales and crafts of many varied tribes.

The Folklife Festival seeks young people for its program, which involves the five days in Washington plus possible travel-exhibitions through the summer. They are trying to show that the traditions shown will remain alive among the young people of the tribes and villages.

Also, the exhausting schedule of several days outdoors during the hot, humid Washington summer may tax the strength of unacclimated older Alaskans.

"Besides showing a realistic picture of the Indian to white tourists," explained Mrs. Nahwooksy, "we hope to show our own people the diversity of their cultures."

The Institution, she explained, sees the Folklife Festival and its various performing groups as a "living addition to the museum exhibits."

For many years, the Smithsonian has collected the best of the thousands and thousands of artifacts of different cultures. Most of these remain housed in various storage rooms and attics of the Institution, with only a tiny percentage on display.

In recent years, people have begun to realize that simple collection and preservation of artifacts of a living culture is not enough.

During the last several years, the museum has greatly expanded its Indian programs, says Mrs. Nahwooksy. In 1970, for the first time the Indian contingent of the Folklife Festival attempted an accurate and representative program.

"We want to bring as representative a group of people from as many groups as possible," according to Mrs. Nahwooksy. During the five days of the festival, participants will hold pow wows and potlatches on consecutive nights.

Panel discussions will focus on contemporary Indian issues, including a panel discussion on termination and one on Indian fishing rights. A panel on Indian arts and crafts will also be held, at which UA assistant professor Ronald Senungetuk has already agreed to appear.

"In essence, the Indian awareness program is an advanced public relations program for the Indian people," explained Mrs. Nahwooksy.

Other activities conducted by the Program include plans for a touring program of Indian music and dance, augmented by classroom workshops and discussion sessions to circulate to educational institutions.

The program is also trying to start nationwide art exhibitions of Native Art in March 1972 and put together touring groups of the major Folklife Festival components.

"We want to change the stereotyped idea others have of us," says Mrs. Nahwooksy.

One means to do this may be a national telethon to bring to public view the Indian and Eskimo visions of himself, declaration of a National Indian Day and a series of Native American stamps featuring Indian leaders.

Already, research work is being done for an extensive Indian program as part of the U.S. bicentennial celebrations in 1976. Funds are available for Indian programs which are being planned along with the yearly programs now being done by the Smithsonian Institute.