

# THE DENVER MARCH POW\*WOW

The Denver March Pow\*Wow started as a weekly event of the Denver Indian Center in 1974 and 1975. It was called the Youth Enrichment Powwow. In 1977 this cultural event was organized by a committee of Denver Native Americans United, Inc. (Denver Indian Center). Then the powwow committee operated separately from other committees of the Denver Indian Center. The Denver March Pow\*Wow became a yearly event directed by this committee composed of a volunteer membership. This group chose officers to handle the large number of annual event activities. Membership on the committee is open to all residents of the Denver Metropolitan area both Indian and non-Indian.

As the event gained in importance and interest, a larger location was needed to hold the Pow\*Wow. The Denver Stock Show Arena was utilized in the early days of the event. Currently, the Denver Coliseum is being used. As a means of generating revenue for the annual Pow\*Wow, vendor spaces were sold and admission was charged. The Denver March Pow\*Wow is now actually three major events:

- 1. An Authentic American Indian Arts & Crafts Show  
(167 booths in 1999)**
- 2. An American Indian Music Festival  
(53+ drum groups in 1999)**
- 3. An American Indian Dance Competition  
(1,500+ dancers in 1999)**

The vendor space was sold to Indian crafts people to market their merchandise to the general public. The Arts and Crafts part of the Pow\*Wow is now one of the major contributors of the revenue needed to conduct the Powwow each year. This part of the Pow\*Wow has grown in size and attracts large numbers of collectors of authentic Indian made crafts. It can be assumed to be one of the largest Indian Markets in the United States. In recent years more than 160 craftspeople have had an opportunity to sell their wares.

The powwow attracts over one thousand individuals from Canada to Central America to compete in the dancing contest part of the annual event. In 1998, people in attendance were from 50 states and 14 countries. In previous years an average of 25 drum groups representing various parts of the country came to sing and provide the musical accompaniment for the dancers. The Denver March Pow\*Wow is popular with the drum groups because the event has always provided an opportunity to sing traditional songs and introduce new music. At the 1997 Pow\*Wow, 69 drum groups registered which is an international record of drum groups attending one powwow. In March 1998, nearly 1,000 dancers registered representing 85 tribes from 28 states and 3 Canadian provinces. The Saturday evening grand entry featured over 1,500 dancers. Attendance at the 1998 powwow was estimated at over 55,000. This number does not include people under 6 and over 60 who are admitted free of charge.

The primary mission of the Denver March Pow\*Wow is to preserve and protect the traditional performing arts of American Indian people. Besides the March Pow\*Wow, the committees has sponsored monthly powwows at the Denver Indian Center; held feasts to honor different groups or occasions such as Veterans day, New Years eve, etc.; co-sponsored conference powwows for National Indian organizations; co-sponsored dance classes for local Indian youth; and held special ceremonies such as the "Wiping the Tears." One of the northern tribal traditions is to prepared food for mourners and "wipe their tears." When families are in mourning, they cannot attend any gatherings or powwows to dance, sing, or socialize. This ceremony encourages mourners to participate because of the belief that to remain in mourning detains the spirit of the departed in this world.

The Denver March Pow\*Wow has been honored by many awards and is recognized as an important national and international event which serves to preserve and protect the traditional performing arts of American Indian people.