

## **The Future of Prairie Trail Federation, Indian Guides and Princesses**

In September the YMCA requested that we convert to Adventure Guides and abandon our American Indian theme or discontinue our affiliation with the YMCA. The Federation Board has been working for the past 6 weeks to evaluate our options and understand all sides of the issue.

During this period of time we met with those who have insisted upon this change, we learned about the Adventure Guides program, and we discussed the issue with the leaders of the Federation at our Longhouse meeting in October. Additionally, we reached out to programs in our area, and in other areas of the country. We have also received numerous comments and emails from members of the federation and the community at large.

The national YMCA made the decision in 2002 to abandon the connection to American Indian culture. They did this in response to complaints received then, which were similar to those made recently in our area. As a result, they created the Adventure Guides program. According to a 2002 Tribune article, published when Y-USA made its decision, there were approximately 25,000 Indian Guide and Princess members in the greater Chicago area. Today, 13 years later, there are 2 active Adventure Guides programs in the area with total participation of a couple hundred people. Contrast this with the fact there are roughly 7000+ participants in Indian Guides and Princesses around Chicago operating outside the auspices of the YMCA.

While investigating our options, we learned that we could form our own organization and still attend the YMCA camps we've always attended. We can obtain our own insurance, maintain our own accounts, and direct our program as we always have. We met with other federations that have done exactly this and continued to offer their programs with little or no change.

The Prairie Trail Federation has been around for over 70 years and has succeeded in building life long bonds between Fathers, Sons, and Daughters. We believe the basis of this success has been the strong connection with a tribe and the uniqueness of a culture and heritage that is very different. It creates interest, excitement, and personal connection for our children. Our program is unmatched in the bond created between father and son and father and daughter. Therefore, after careful consideration, we have decided to break from the YMCA and continue this beloved and rewarding program as our own group.

We use American Indian themes in our program, but we do not pretend to be American Indians. Our children are not confused. American Indian themes exist all around us, the name of our state, the city of Chicago, and most of the YMCA camps we attend. We are trying to share the ways of an indigenous culture, the importance of family, life, God, the four winds, and corn. Culture should be shared and learned from. Dropping all Native references benefits and teaches no one.

Our program is unique and has developed its own culture. "How How" is the way we greet each other, Sign of the Buffalo is how we greet the kids, these are not Native, they are ours, it's our Prairie Trail culture.

Patrick Duffy, a member of our federation wrote the following:

*"As someone who is both a member of IG&P (Indian Guides and Princesses) and an enrolled member of the Tuscaroran Indian Nation I have a unique perspective on this situation. My mother grew up as a Native on the reservation and I struggle with finding ways to educate my children on the proud ways of their great grandmother and grandmother's culture.*

*Never in my five years as a member of IG&P have I heard or seen one disrespectful mention of Native American culture. Take away this link to the kids and I fear that the ways of the Native Americans will be lost forever. No this organization is not one of the problems, it is one of the solutions."*

We are proud to be part of this great program. Reasonable people can disagree and members of the American Indian community disagree regarding this program. The greatness of our country is that people can disagree and still be free to make choices. America is the great melting pot of cultures. We have adopted elements of cultures from all over the world. The Prairie Trail Federation uses some aspects of American Indian culture as a way to engage, teach, and love our children. It's the canvas we use to paint life long memories.

Long live the Prairie Trail Federation!

