Flash back for TONKAWA Inter Tribal Council of Elders

Understand what Native American Life is like, today, and discover what it used to be like

TONKAWA Community Family Picnic: 2005
By Roy Cook

Such a glorious day in the park! It seems so simple to be there and just feel as if we naturally belong to this American Indian group even though we may be far away from where we may come from. Down home goodness wrapped with respect and appreciation. Smiles upon smiles carried the day into the activities and feasting. Spiced with laughter, the cooks labored pleasantly over the hot grills. Early in the morning Saturday, August 20 we assembled at the Admiral Baker Park Area six campsite with 18 tables and two charcoal grills. We had arranged for four large coolers to be rented from the Navy base. Jerry Starns did much of the meat items and condiments shopping for the grilling.
Henry Mendibles brought cases upon cases of brand name soda for the event. Mara Peters brought cases of bottled water to be chilled. Juan Castellanos brought bags and bags of ice to keep all the salads, side dishes, water, soda, salsa and anything else that needed to be cold.

Jerry Starns fired up the grill and started the hamburgers, hot dogs and brats. Later in the day Jonathan York would put on his beribboned apron and spell Jerry at the grill. Don Vigneault was also wearing a beribboned apron but he was teased in the late afternoon because it did not have the tiniest spot or sign of labor!

The rest of us rearranged all the present picnic elements into some semblance of order and flow. Tables were covered and areas designated for crafts and Bingo games. Lillian Arguilez offered cheerful instruction to an eager class of children and adults on how to assemble her interpretations of "dream catchers". Mara Peters also offered instruction on yarn gods’ eyes. Prizes were arranged and determined for the children and adult games during the day.

Volcan Mountain Singers sang round dance songs with English words during the craft classes and attracted interest from many younger visitors and their parents. People started arriving early. Some ate and left but many stayed for all the activities and many others would keep arriving until late into the day. There were several tragic events most recently in our community and we knew many would be attending to other obligations and also others were occupied with the inevitable summer visitors from out of town. We were all very pleasantly delighted to enjoy sustained representation from local tribal and many participating American
Indian organizations in San Diego. This event is a cooperative effort of: Tonkawa Elders social club, Indian Human Resource Center, American Indian Clinic, and the American Indian Warriors Association.

The American Indian Warriors Association (AIWA) had volunteered to represent and share particular responsibilities of the day that only someone with an active or retired Military ID could fulfill. Fortunately we have many members to call upon to share this requirement.

Further, following the opening blessing by TONKAWA President Esther Abrahano, the AIWA Color Guard presented the Nation and service flags in a military fashion. We had a fine representation of American Indian combat veterans who have served honorably to defend this Indian land from tyranny.

Vicky Gambala’s famous crazy hat and now, for those wondering minds, crazy shoe contest was outrageously successful. Yona Welch was recruited to be the judge. In fine Cherokee fashion he kept announcing he could be bribed by watermelon or cake but he was just kidding. Many of the entries did display hours of work and a serious determination to be one of the winners.
The Bingo games and the excellent prizes were the main adult activity other than eating cake and cupcakes and many other healthy delights that were brought in as potluck side dishes. Our youthful Bingo callers: Melissa Aleman and Rene Estrada made every effort to make sure all heard the numbers. They even had a designated runner to take the call to the last tables.

Ramona Colton and Kristen Tulkki organized the children games and held them in the later afternoon. It is always very important for Indian children to realize that fun is happy experiences and should not be hurtful or belittling to any one else.

By and large that was the way the day went. Eat a little. Laugh a lot, come back and eat a little more, do a craft project come back and eat a little more and have an ice cold soda pop or two, laugh a lot more. Meet old friends and visit with new people to
the San Diego American Indian community. One thing about our Indian families, we are the bench mark for diversity in action. That has been our traditional custom and practice and it will continue to be, as will our Indian ways as long as we come together in camp circles and get together like this TONKAWA Community Family picnic. Our sincere thanks to our supporting Tribal Community Committee: Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians. Hope to see you and your family at the next event. Mehan, Aho, thank you.