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‘Drums Along the Wildcat’ celebrates Native American heritage in Kokomo

KOKOMO, Ind. – Join us Saturday, Sept. 23, 2023, from 10 a.m. until dark at Foster Park (721 West Superior Street) here for “Drums Along the Wildcat,” a multi-tribal traditional gathering featuring exhibitions, merchandise and community services information.

“The drums were silenced, and dancing stopped with the forced removal of many Native American families here in the 1840s,” said Kokomo Mayor Tyler Moore, a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. “It will be a special moment on Saturday, Sept. 23, when the drums and the dancing resumes and our community can gather to celebrate together.”

The rain-or-shine event is free and open to the public. All are welcome.

Vendors open at 10 a.m. and the ceremonial event starts with the Grand Entry of flags and dancers into the dancing circle at 11 a.m. Special honor recognitions and various dancing and drumming exhibitions will take place periodically throughout the day, with Evening Grand Entry at 6 p.m. The event will also feature vendors selling authentic tribal merchandise and food, as well as community and health organizations providing information about their services for the public.

“This will be a unique experience as the first multi-tribal gathering here since Indian removals some 180 years ago,” Mayor Moore said. All of Howard County, Indiana, lies in the residue of the Great Miami Reserve, the mayor noted. In 1844, Kokomo became the county seat of the last-named county on the last communal land of the Miami tribe of Indians.

David Foster, president of the Kokomo Early History Learning Center, Inc., is a fifth-generation descendant of the family that helped organize Kokomo in those early days. He said the event is designed to ensure everyone can learn more about this shared history.

“About two-and-a-half percent of Howard County residents selected Native American as identity on the most recent U.S. federal census,” Foster said. “We look forward to hearing their stories and learning more about their lives. We hope everyone in the community can join us Sept. 23 as we celebrate Indigenous and contemporary culture on ancestral homeland.”

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ABOUT THE EVENT

This event, the fourth in a series, is sponsored by Kokomo Native Initiative, an alliance of organizations in Howard County, Indiana, including the City of Kokomo, the Howard County Historical Society, Indiana University Kokomo, and the Kokomo Early History Learning Center, Inc. The group supports the social, cultural, community and economic development initiatives of the Indiana Native American Indian Affairs Commission (INAIAC) by creating programs and activities to educate the local community and to help Native people learn more about services and support available to them in northcentral Indiana.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Kokomo has a unique place in Indiana history, being the last-named county seat of the last-named county on the last communal land of the Miami Tribe of Indians. All of Howard County (originally named Richardville for Maawikima Jean Baptiste Richardville) lies in the residue of the Great Miami Reserve. Although tribal government was forcibly removed from these ancestral homelands by 1846, removal could never erase Native identity and culture. Miami tribal names remained for Indiana's last county and its county seat at Kokomo.

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‘Drums Along the Wildcat’: Media Information

What is this event, where is it and when does it start?

“Drums Along the Wildcat” is a multi-tribal traditional gathering featuring drums, dancing, merchandise and community services information. It will take place at Foster Park (721 West Superior Street) in Kokomo, Indiana, on Saturday, Sept. 23, 2023. Vendors open at 10 a.m. and the Grand Entry of flags and dancers into the drumming and dancing circle happens at 11 a.m. Special honor recognitions and various dancing and drumming exhibitions will take place periodically throughout the day, with Evening Grand Entry at 6 p.m. The rain-or-shine event is free and open to the public. All are welcome.

Who organized this event?

The Kokomo Native Initiative, which is an alliance of organizations in Howard County, Indiana, including the City of Kokomo, the Howard County Historical Society, Indiana University Kokomo, and the Kokomo Early History Learning Center, Inc.

Who are the sponsors of the event?

“Drums Along the Wildcat” is sponsored by the City of Kokomo. Additional support and funding were made possible and provided by the Community Foundation of Howard County, Inc.; Solidarity Community Federal Credit Union, Kokomo, Indiana; Indiana University Kokomo; the

Kokomo-Howard County Public Library; the Howard County (Indiana) Historical Society; and the Kokomo Early History Learning Center, Inc.

What Native tribes are in the area?

Indigenous peoples have lived in Howard County, Indiana, for thousands of years. This ancestral homeland includes the Miami, the Potawatomi, and many others before, during and after the era of Indian removal began in the 1830s and '40s. Removal did not erase Native culture and heritage. In fact, about two-and-a-half percent of Howard County, Indiana, residents selected Native American as identity on the most recent U.S. federal census. Plus, Miami tribal names remained for Indiana's last-named county (Richardville/Howard) and its county seat at Kokomo.

What does "Kokomo" mean?

We don't know. The historical evidence and sources are inconclusive, and current scholarship questions the earlier interpretations of the tribal name. So, at this time, we don't understand the scope and meaning of the word. What is important is that this tribal word has been the name of our community since at least 1843.

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