

# 'Realizing the Dream'

# 40th annual Wacipi held at USD

By David Lias

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Last year, organizers of the annual USD Wacipi had an easy time getting a head count of the number of participants.

Dancers, organizers and family members from tribes across South Dakota and surrounding states found themselves packed in the ballroom of the Muenster University Center on the USD campus in 2011.

Last weekend, as the Wacipi marked its 40th anniversary at USD, it returned to its former, and much larger home – the DakotaDome.

"This event has been held in the Dome in the early 1990s," said Wyatt Pickner, a senior at USD majoring in American

Indian Studies/Clinical Lab studies who is a member of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe. "I believe 1992 was the last time the Wacipi was held here. This is the first year that the event has returned to the Dome."

The USD Wacipi was held in conjunction with the 15th annual Building Bridges Conference and Native Weekend at USD March 17-18.

"Saturday was really our big day, we use Sunday as a time for wrapping up, tying up loose ends and making sure we finish up all of the contests," said Pickner, who served as president of Tiospaye.U in 2010 and 2011. This year, he is serving as one of two student advisors for the organization.

"We have so much room here ... it's hard to estimate how many people have attended," he said. "We have a really good number of dancers and quite a few drums."

The 40th annual Wacipi at USD serves as milestone, he said.

"We were really happy that, with the significance of the 40th anniversary, we were able to have this in the Dome," Pickner said.

Presented by the Tiospaye Student Council, the Wacipi is a powwow featuring Native dancers, drummers as well as Tiospaye competitions, including Miss, Junior Miss and Little Miss USD Tiospaye.

The 40th annual Wacipi was part of the 2012 "Realizing the Dream" Native Weekend at the University of South Dakota. Additional

activities included a Native American Symposium, the Native American Alumni Banquet, the 15th annual Building Bridges Conference and Native U Weekend Visit.

The Wacipi was open to anyone who wished to attend. Those not familiar with the customs of a powwow soon noticed different styles of dance taking place on the wooden basketball floor of the DakotaDome.

The men's traditional dance symbolizes a battle or the story of a hunt. The men's grass dance is said to have come from the past, when dancers were sent in first to stomp down long grass to make a clearing for the other dancers during a powwow.

Men's fancy dancing became a traditional part of Wacipis in the late



Anika Whiting participates in a contest dance Sunday afternoon during the 40th annual Wacipi held at USD. The event, held in the DakotaDome, was part of the 2012 "Realizing the Dream" Native Weekend at USD March 17-18. See more photos of the event at spotted.plaintalk.net.

(Photo by David Lias)

1900s. Boys and young men, who wear brilliantly colored bustles and dance regalia, prefer this style.

The women's traditional dance is simple in appearance, but plays a very important symbolic role. The dancers move their feet to the beat of the drum to represent the heartbeat of mother earth, to heal the world.

Many of the women and young girls wore jingle dresses. The small jingles that adorn their clothing, made of twisted tin, represent waves of water and thunder as they performed what is known as a healing dance.

It was impossible to not notice the female dancers who performed in the style commonly referred to as fancy. These dancers wore elaborately beaded dance regalia, covered by long, decorated, fringed shawls. These Wacipi participants made efforts to resemble butterflies, spreading out

their shawl-covered arms as they spun in tiny circles on the DakotaDome floor.

Amy Whiting of Mission sat in the bleachers Sunday afternoon, watching her two granddaughters, Anika Whiting and Alayah Whiting, participate in a contest dance.

"There is a jingle dance, and a fancy dance, which Anika dances in, and Alayah dances in both traditional and jingle," Amy said.

Amy and her two granddaughters are members of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. They find themselves on the road quite often, so that they may participate in Wacipis regularly scheduled each year in the Midwest.

"It's important, and I like them not to be able to get in trouble," she said. "That's why we do it – to keep them involved in positive activities."

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