

A tip or two from Chief Keokuk
October 2006

Alive and Well

There has been much concern expressed about the Rich Port YMCA selling its building. If this is news to you, yes, the Rich Port YMCA is selling the property, lock, stock, and barrel in order to fund the construction of a new YMCA. There will be temporary facilities at a location about five minutes away, and gyms and pools in the area will be leased so the Y can offer its many programs.

But dads, and moms, have been asking me this question: with the sale of the YMCA, what happens to Indian Guides, Indian Princesses and Trailblazers? My answer is always the same: ***Our program will continue with, or without, a building.*** Our program is alive and well! We have been expanding each year. Our membership is headed towards an enrollment over 2,800 with 92 tribes serving about a dozen different towns. Our event and campout schedules are jam-packed, tribes are busy with meetings, and events are underway. This is a healthy program that will continue long after the YMCA is torn down and long past the construction of a new Y.

We are not about bricks and mortar. Our program takes place wherever dads and kids spend time together. That's the entire purpose of what we do. The building known as the Rich Port YMCA can be torn down and rebuilt elsewhere, while our program still thrives. The physical space we need is found in the homes of our members. Tribes meet in basements and backyards. Sometimes we use local schools and churches. We meet in parks and forest preserves and at local pools and clubs. We have family events all over the western suburbs and Chicagoland, and our campouts are spread out in four states at the best camps we can find.

However, the actual physical building of the Rich Port Y does provide us with a place to have our monthly Longhouse Meetings. The Y also provides us with an office and an employee for processing registration, packing campout boxes, storing supplies and publishing the monthly Smoke Signals. We will have some space at the Y's temporary facilities, but we need to locate space elsewhere for some events and meetings. But these things are just administrative details. We'll get through it. What we can bank on right now is this: our successful program will continue through the dads who participate, who spend time with their kids, who shoulder the task of planning campouts, who gladly run events, who run their tribes and who work as Nation Chiefs running this great Federation.

But how do we respond when the Rich Port Y sets out on its most ambitious building project since it first opened fifty years ago? The YMCA is not about bricks and mortar either. The Y is about programming offering an amazing array of instructional programs, fitness programs, and day care and support of all kinds. (Just look at the Y's Programming Catalog. It's astounding!) And the best way for the Rich Port YMCA to offer all that it does, is through it's ownership of a new facility.

So, we return to bricks and mortar. What do we do as a Federation when the Y asks for our support? My heartfelt recommendation is that we open our wallets. We should support the Y. We should support the Y individually and as a Federation. This Y has been very good to us. In a time of over-zealous political correctness and change, we have been able to keep a program that borrows from the richness of the Native American culture. Our Y allows us our strong independence, but still supports us while respecting the decision making of our Nation Chiefs. Therefore, we should return that support and help our Y in this time of re-building.

But, there is another bigger reason for supporting our local Y. The Rich Port YMCA is part of our community. Just like excellent schools and great churches, a top flight YMCA enriches the community. It's part of the fabric of our western suburbs. A great Y helps sustain the quality of the towns it serves.

Indian Guides, Indian Princesses and Trailblazers are about community. Through friendly service to each other, to our families, to our tribes, and to our communities, we seek a world that is pleasing to the eye of the Great Spirit. Does this sound familiar? It should. These words are right from our ceremonies. And supporting the Y supports our own community. Our lives, our families, and our villages are enriched when the local YMCA is thriving, thereby making our little part of the universe pleasing to the Great Spirit and a better place in which to live.

--John C. Lorenzen
Federation Chief Keokuk