

2017 Indian National Finals Rodeo

Ready-for-Release Story #1 --- PARADE OF NATIONS

by Lee Allen

Ever since the first celebration of modern Olympic Games took place in Athens in 1896 where athletes from 14 nations were celebrated, the concept of a Parade of Nations has gained popularity. Attesting to that rise in recognition is the fact than more than 11,000 athletes representing over 200 nations took part in the 2016 Summer Olympics Parade of Nations in Rio last year.

Indian National Finals Rodeo included that parade concept for the first time last year as a display of honor among the 75 tribal nations in the U.S. and Canada who competed to be acknowledged among the best-of-the-best by winning a world championship. In its introductory appearance, 15 tribes stepped up to sponsor their flag in the 2016 Grand Entry.

"This is indicative of the type of sponsorship support we were hoping for," said INFR General Manager Donna Hoyt, "and we're enthusiastically hoping the concept catches on even further for the 2017 event this November."

"A lot of our top athletes come from reservations that don't have casino gaming to help sponsor them," added INFR Commissioner Bo Voci (Oglala Sioux). "Displaying their tribal banner shows support for the Indian rodeo and the members who make it all possible."

Historically, "Native Americans have relied upon costume, art, and totems to distinguish themselves from one another and the European-dominated culture that is the modern United States," according to author Donald Healy writing in *Flags of the Native Peoples*. "Adoption of flags by tribes can be seen as a tool to instill pride in the hearts and minds of people too often forgotten by federal and state governments.

"Another inducement to adopt flags has been an increasing involvement in the gaming industry (that has brought) millions of visitors. With this influx, tribes found a need for a readily-acceptable symbol of sovereignty."

Whatever the rationale behind the origin of a tribe's flag, it is a point of both identification and pride and INFR's decision to include a Parade of Nations flag display in their rodeo offers an opportunity for a show of support, a display of unity and the cowboys and cowgirls who represent their respective tribes.

One level of donation allows the flying of a tribe's flag during the Grand Entry in each of the 10 performances of INFR while a higher donation amount includes the Grand Entry flying of the flag as well as the tribal banner being carried in all victory laps won by that tribe's members --- and that nation's flag will join any tribal world champions on stage during the awards ceremony.

"The Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma decided to participate in the Parade of Nations at the 2016 Indian National Final Rodeo to represent the Ioway people and our culture," said Chairman Bobby Walkup. "It's an honor to be involved in INFR where all tribes can come together and showcase the talented young men and women who represent our communities.

"We were happy to have the opportunity to participate last year and are definitely excited about again being a part of this year's rodeo. It's a show of support for INFR and for Indian rodeo in general and I'd love to see more tribes with flags in 2017. Displaying a tribal flag is a point of pride, a positive step, and the tribes that are involved in rodeo that don't become a part of the Parade of Nations are missing out on a good opportunity to be showcased. We encourage other tribes to support this event that gives our young competitors an opportunity to compete with other Native Americans in a world-renowned venue."

For further information concerning the 2017 Parade of Nations, contact the INFR office, (406) 338 7684.

