

Indian Winter Games more than sporting event

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They're called games but the 1994 Saskatchewan Indian Winter Games are a lot more than just another sporting event.

That's the message organizers and representatives of various Saskatchewan aboriginal groups sent to potential sponsors gathered for a luncheon at the Saskatoon Inn Tuesday. The Games, which are hosted by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, are scheduled to take place in Meadow Lake and Beauval from Feb. 24-27

and will operate with the theme "youth wellness in sports, culture and recreation."

"For our tribal council, this is looking at building on wellness, looking at bridging a lot of the relationships we have whether it's with government, industry, business or individuals. It goes beyond the actual competition or games. It's looking at a new way of getting along with people we live beside day by day," says Ray Ahenakew, executive director for the Meadow Lake Tribal Council.

The Games are expected to attract some 2,300 athletes, coaches and trainers along with another

5,200 spectators. Sports included in the games are hockey, volleyball, broomball, badminton, wrestling and cross-country skiing. For the first time, Special Olympics athletes are also among those participating in the latter sport.

Cultural events such as sweet grass ceremonies to start each day and traditional aboriginal games will also be included in the package along with "wellness" workshops designed to give aboriginal youth healthy, positive alternatives.

"In these Games, we're hoping that the wellness part is instilled in at least a few of those athletes

and that they can go back to their communities with a sense of pride and start the healing process," says Games senior co-ordinator Robert Fiddler.

Eugene Arcand, vice-chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, says that focus on youth is what sets the Saskatchewan Indian Winter and Summer Games apart.

"We want to give them more opportunities to showcase their talents, be it in sports, be it in culture, in the arts, dancing, singing, whatever. If we get a chance to get a kid to showcase their talent every second weekend - one

weekend at a pow wow, one weekend at a sporting event - there's less chance of bad things happening to that young person and that will snowball."

Arcand also sees the Games as an opportunity for the non-aboriginal community to break down the barriers and stereotypes which now exist.

"People can come and see, instead of assuming we do nothing in our communities and we just sit around and are lazy, all those stereotypes that exist. They can participate as volunteers or observers and they can see that stereotype doesn't really exist."

As part of the new approach, Ahenakew says aboriginal people are looking beyond the usual government channels for support and expects a majority of the Games' \$275,000 budget to come from the private sector and corporate sponsors as well as the native community itself with a smaller percentage to come from government.

"The private sector is responding really well. It's too bad we didn't do this 20 years ago and look at a new way of doing business with our own partners in this province."