

VIEW FROM THE TOP

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## Profile: Bobby Gonzalez' Energy Moves Native Harvest Fest

For the last three years, Bobby Gonzalez has volunteered his time to make endless phone calls, type letters, arrange for performers, search for donations -- all in his new-found new role as the tireless organizer of one of Van Cortlandt Park's and the borough's, best events -- the Native Harvest Festival at Van Cortlandt House Museum.

This unique event focuses on education, and celebrates the traditional Native harvest, a time when village people gathered to tell stories, perform dances and play music. Gonzalez sees the event as an opportunity.

"It is important to build bridges between the Native and the non-Native communities," he explained, "bridges of understanding."

Gonzalez is particularly excited about this year's theme, the Native American-African Exchange, a focus that gives the event a unique cultural perspective.

The soft-spoken Taino Native is well known in the Native American community and throughout the city for his storytelling and poetry readings. He first became a Van Cortlandt Park fixture in the fall of 1996 when he was a Writer In Residence at the Urban Forest Ecology Center. The program, sponsored by The Bronx Council on the Arts (BCA) was conducted in cooperation with the Urban Park Rangers, and enabled Gonzalez to share his stories with schoolchildren and other groups visiting the park. In fact, Gonzalez credits



Native American dancer performing at last year's Native Harvest Festival

BCA with the idea for the Native Harvest Festival.

"They pointed out the Bronx was the only borough that didn't have a Native festival or powwow," said Gonzalez. After volunteering to organize the first event in 1997, he was pleasantly surprised that it became a successful, annual event.

For the past 15 years, Gonzalez has shared his stories and folktales with numerous audiences. He credits his start in storytelling with his good fortune to get his

first "gig" at the Museum of the American Indian and to work on the committee that had coordinated the Inwood Hill Park Native Festival. Gonzalez has traveled all over the country, hosted several poetry readings, and will soon have his own poems published in a Native cultural magazine.

A Taino Native and also a proud native of the Bronx, Gonzalez credits his parents with his love of his heritage. "They instilled in me a deep appreciation for my Native heritage."