

## **Aboriginal Festival moves to Hamilton**

### **By Sam Laskaris, Today correspondent**

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HAMILTON – The largest aboriginal festival in Canada is no longer in the country's largest city.

The [Canadian Aboriginal Festival](#), which had been staged in Toronto the past 15 years, will be held in Hamilton, about 40 miles west of Toronto, Nov. 27 – 29.

The festival was previously held at the Rogers Centre (formerly SkyDome), one of Toronto's most popular attractions and home of Major League Baseball's Toronto Blue Jays.

It will now be held at Hamilton's Copps Coliseum, the city's largest arena with a seating capacity close to 20,000.

Festival organizers said they opted to move the event to Hamilton as it was never supported by Toronto officials.

"We're very pleased with the reception we've gotten from Hamilton," said Ron Robert, the program director of Indian Art-I-Crafts of Ontario, the festival organizers. "They've supported us financially and their tourism people have promoted our event."

Over the years, festival organizers had repeatedly asked Toronto city officials for some type of support, including financial. But it was never given.

"I think the support we've received from the city (of Hamilton) is surprising, to be honest," said Robert, who wouldn't disclose how much financial assistance Hamilton is providing to the festival. "It's quite refreshing."

Organizers signed a three-year contract to stage the annual festival in Hamilton.

Robert said the festival has never really been a money-maker; organizers hope to break even most years.

He said earlier this decade the festival lost close to \$40,000 one year. Since then, reaching break-even points has been the norm.

Robert believes that could change this year. "We're hoping this year we'll be in the black."

About 40,000 people attended last year's event. He's hoping this figure will at least be duplicated in Hamilton, which he believes will help the event turn a profit.

"That's so hard to tell," he said. "But we'll know once we get going."

"It gives us some room for next year," he said of a possible surplus, which he predicted could potentially be about \$50,000.

This year's festival will feature about 250 vendors, the same number that took part last year. While some Toronto-area ones will not be taking part this year, Robert said several new ones, from Hamilton and other southern Ontario locations will be showing up.

Festival organizers have received plenty of positive feedback regarding the move to Hamilton. Vendors and those from out of town who plan to attend are speaking favorably of the move as it will be more affordable.

"It seems everything is cheaper now in Hamilton than it is in downtown Toronto," Robert said. "The hotels are cheaper. The transportation is cheaper. And parking is cheaper."

Though the festival has moved to another city, Robert said previous festival-goers can anticipate much of the same as they did at events in Toronto.

"It's basically the same format. We've just been concentrating on the move (and haven't had time to plan for any changes)."

A festival highlight each year has been the powwow, which features more than 1,000 dancers, making it the country's largest.

The festival also includes the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards, where the country's top musical talents are honored in 25 different categories.

The 2009 CAMA gala will be held Nov. 27 at the Hamilton Place Theatre.

Besides winners for Best Female and Male Single artists, CAMA trophies will also be presented to winners in a variety of categories including Best Fiddle Album, Best Hip Hop or Rap Music Video, Best Traditional Flute Album and Best Album Cover Design.

Several of the CAMA nominees will perform during the award presentations; there will also be numerous musical performances at Copps Coliseum during the three-day festival.

The festival also includes an education day where area elementary school children can learn about aboriginal life. About 7,000 children are expected to attend. There will be 30 teaching stations set up where children can learn about aboriginal heritage, culture, games and dancing.

There will also be various workshops, a fashion show and an amateur lacrosse skills competition.