

Piasa Indians reunion at Alton VFW is emotional, time of reflection for Norma Glazebrook

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer
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ALTON - The Piasa Indians, a state and national champion drum drill team, recently gathered at the VFW Post 1308 for what was described as an "emotional and fun reunion."



Founded, choreographed and managed by Norma Helwig Glazebrook, the drill corps entertained marching in parades and twirling in exhibitions as well as competed across the country between 1955 and 1975. Over the years, the Piasa Indians included a baton, drum line and flag corps.

The recent reunion provided members of the Piasa Indians a chance to give thanks to Glazebrook for creating a physical outlet for children as well as teaching discipline, teamwork and responsibility while having fun.

Glazebrook, now 86, said the reunion went "fantastic" and she was so excited to see her former team members. The Piasa Indians were national champions under Glazebrook and featured on a national stage because of the team's talent.

"I believe we had people from seven states," Glazebrook said of the reunion. "We had a really good reunion and some of the old-timers back that were in the corps in the early '50s. It was emotional for me, but a good emotion. I wasn't sad, I thought it was just wonderful the girls and boys put this together."

Glazebrook said she had many fond memories of the time she and the youth traveled across the country.

Once the team was being transported near Chicago and stayed in grasses near the Chicago zoo, close to zoo animals, which was interesting, Glazebrook said. She said the zookeepers were extremely nice to her and the team members. Another time, the group crossed the U.S. border to Canada and the place they were staying at thought they were real Indians. The people expected the Piasa Indians to set up their wig-wams. The group stayed there, but had to bath with swimming suits in the lake and the accommodations left a lot to be desired. One other funny memory was when the boys and girls were staying at the YMCA and she was told the boys had been tossing water balloons off the sixth floor.

"I was afraid someone would get hurt and pulled my army cot and slept there all night making sure the boys didn't misbehave again," Glazebrook said.

Some of the Piasa Indian alums told Norma the time with the group helped shape their life and provided a work ethic they never forgot. The group ate on \$3 a day each, so they also learned to watch their money in regard to food.

"It was an amazing experience working with them. In 1990, we had a reunion and I told them most of you are out in the workforce and world and I hope you have used the discipline you learned to apply yourself in anything you want to do."

The group of Piasa Indians never forgot their leader and they all remain close, some five or six decades later.