

# 'Chief' offers mediation on controversy

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CHAMPAIGN — Chief AJ is coming to West Side Park today with a message to the "children" of Chief Illiniwek to stop their bickering.

Chief AJ — aka Ambassador John, aka John Huffer of Tuscola — is the chief of the Central Illinois Tribal Council, which has recently merged with the Western Cherokee Nation to represent 6,000 Native Americans in Illinois, Huffer said.

The tribe, he maintains, has a history of representing Chief Illiniwek and being a voice in the controversy that so far has been ignored.

The University of Illinois, however, isn't so sure about Huffer's legitimacy. A letter was sent to Huffer on Friday politely suggesting he cease his representations, said UI spokesman Bill Murphy.

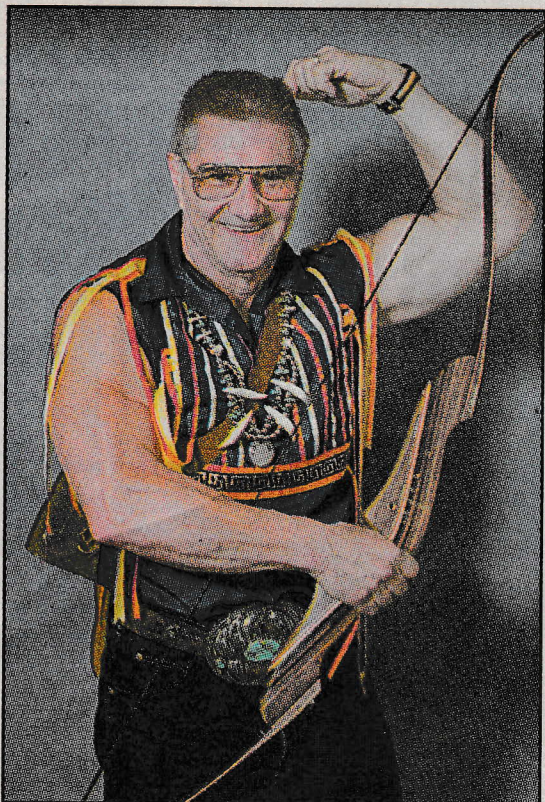
Huffer, who produced documentation identifying him as a tribal judge, has planned a news conference for 2 p.m. at the Taste of Champaign-Urbana, where he will offer to mediate the dispute and announce the availability of Chief Illiniwek bows and arrows.

"I plan to speak about Chief Illiniwek and his two sets of bickering children," Huffer said Friday. "One set of children dresses in suits and ties. They want me to dance for them only. They have misused and abused my image to their financial benefit.

"My other set of children wear beads and feathers. They do not want me to dance any more. This set of children have gone to wipe-out extreme. They lack insight into what my dancing could do for Native Americans. I am chief enough to dance for both sets of children and benefit all my children," Huffer said.

Huffer said he wants the UI to continue to allow the Chief to dance as long as the dance is authentic and done for the elevation of Native Americans. He also wants any proceeds from the use of the symbol to go to a Native American scholarship fund.

Huffer and the UI have a long history. Huffer grew up in Urbana and played football for the UI in the 1950s. A retired construction contractor, his former business was Central Illinois Tribal Council Inc., doing business as A.J. Contracting, which made repairs to Memorial Stadi-



News-Gazette staff photo

John Huffer of Tuscola has planned a news conference for 2 p.m. today at West Side Park in Champaign, where he will offer his services to mediate the dispute over Chief Illiniwek.

um in the early 1980s.

At the time, he was also qualified as a minority contractor with the State Capital Development Board.

Murphy, of the UI, said Huffer is being discouraged from holding the news conference.

"We're just pointing out that Chief Illiniwek is a trademark. We have to police our trademark or lose it," he said.

Each of Huffer's commemorative recurve bows has a Chief Illiniwek head engraved in the wooden grip. The cost is \$495 per bow. Huffer, 63, is a championship archer and body builder who is being sponsored by Archery Magazine for a European tour this summer.

Proceeds from the sale of the bows will go to the Indian heritage registration drive.

Huffer in 1983 sold commemorative Chief Illiniwek revolvers, and presented a set to President Reagan that year.

Huffer's mother was a Menominee Indian and he maintains his goal all along is to honor the traditions of the Illinois Indians. He is also seeking help in getting grants from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.