

# On the Side: Little Miami District Employee Dances to the Beat of (His)tory

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Mark Banks pays tribute to his Native American heritage through dance and drum performances.

For Mark Banks, performing the dances and songs of his Native American ancestors is not a hobby; it's an honor.

"I do this as part of my culture," he said. "It's who we are and a way of life."

Banks, who does maintenance work at the Little Miami District Office in Milford, Ohio, travels across the region, performing native drumming and dances with the Southern Singers Drum Group. The group makes appearances at schools, nursing homes and festivals. The group also performs at pow-wows, Native American gatherings featuring singing and dancing.

Many of Banks' family members participate, including his father, Jesse, and son Matt, a meter reader in the Todhunter District. Mark is the lead singer and drum keeper.

"We educate audiences on who we are, our history, our background and our clothing, which we call regalia," he said. "The drums and dancing tell stories."

"I educate people on how important it is that the earth is alive, and it is our purpose to take care of it the best we can," Banks added.

In his performances, Banks celebrates nature and encourages children and adults to experience and appreciate it. He doesn't dwell on the early treatment of Native Americans in America. Instead, he focuses on the positive: the rich diversity of cultures in the country today.

Banks said his mother and father, both of Cherokee descent, passed on the traditions he now enjoys. His performances help him tell their stories and keep their history alive.

"I do this to honor my family and ancestors," he said.

