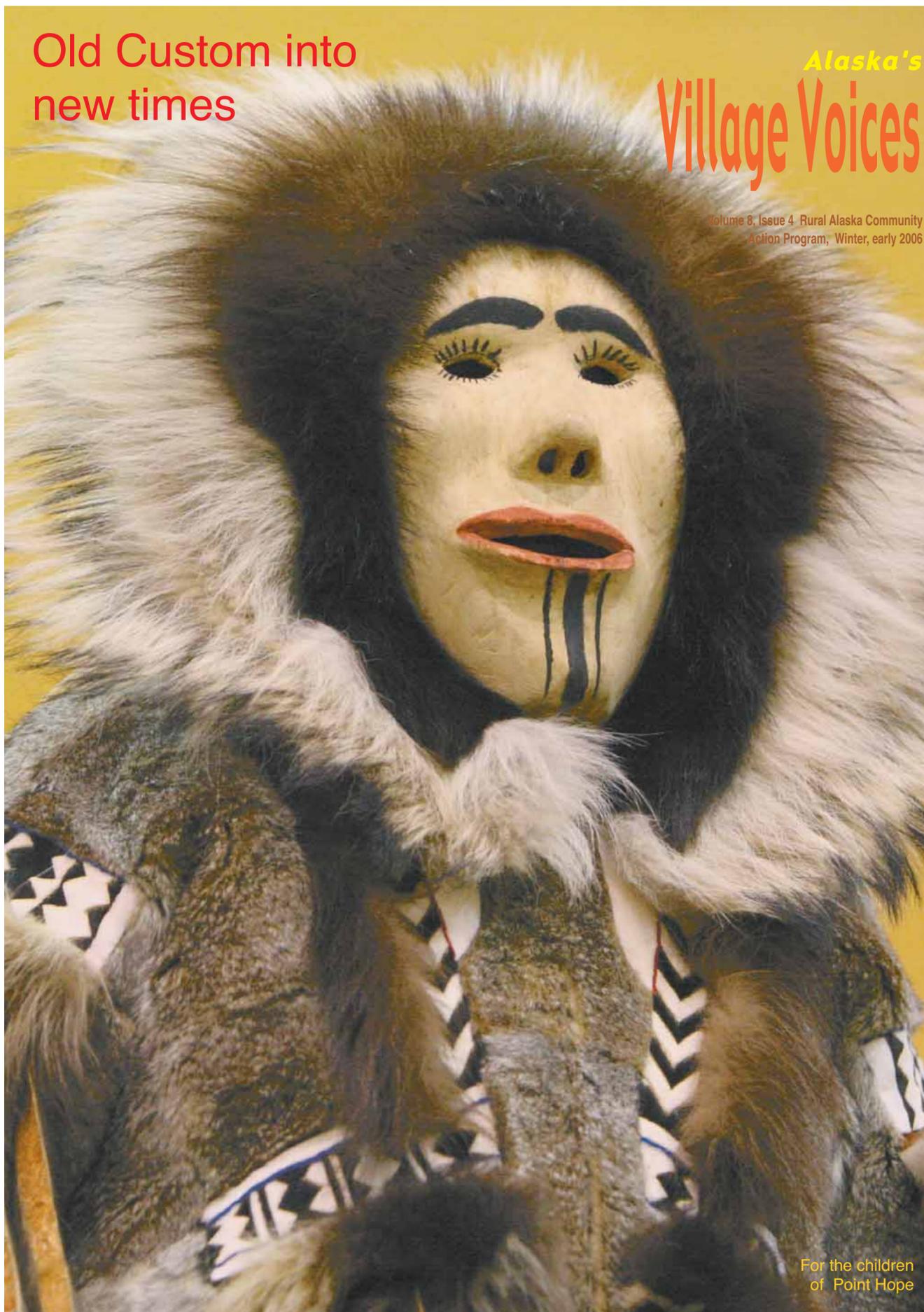


Old Custom into
new times

Alaska's
Village Voices

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For the children
of Point Hope



RurAL CAP

Healthy People, Sustainable
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RurAL CAP
731 E. 8th Avenue
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For the children of Point Hope



Point Hope children Eva Marie Lisbourne (above), brothers Sayers and Charlie Tuzroyluk (opposite, top) and Susailug Hank.

Old Custom, New Times

in the oldest town in the United States

Point Hope is said to be the oldest, continually occupied, community in North America. More important in many ways to those who live there than archeological evidence that dates back to possibly 6000 years are the oral histories, handed down since time-immemorial. These place the origins of the village back in a time not even envisioned by archeologists, back when the world was dark and everything was upside down and backwards, back to the days when *Tulunigaaq* harpooned a great sea-monster, which then rose out of the Chukchi Sea to form that index-finger of a peninsula called Tikigaaq - the pointing finger.

Among the students of that history is hunter Steve Oommittuk. While Oommittuk reads all that he can find on the subject, he considers his grandmother and the village elders of the sixties, seventies and eighties as his most important teachers. One of these was Jimmy Killugvik, or Asatchaq, who was born in 1890 and died in 1980. "Asatchaq was the keeper of a lot of these stories and these songs that kept them alive," Oommittuk remembers. "he was good story teller, and he was very strict. When you danced, if you made one mistake, he stopped the whole thing. One person might make a mistake, but he would do it over until everybody got it right, no matter how long it took.

"He had a cane and people were scared of him. He can scold people. Nobody could run in front of him because he would hit you with that cane. He hit me a few times." Today, Oommittuk feels only gratitude and respect for Asatchaq and he is sorry that, in place of such a story-teller and educator, the children of today have TV and X-boxes.

The stories and the oral histories told by Asatchaq were many and detailed, and reached back to creation. They told of *Tulunigaaq*, or Raven, formed from the soot of a seal-oil lamp with the beak of a raven protruding from his forehead. He is the one who freed the sun so that it could shine upon the earth.

Asatchaq told stories of the moon and the sun and many of the stories were explicit and graphic, full of sorrow and tragedy, and lessons on how to live. Perhaps some missionaries frowned upon such discussions, but "this was the way of life, letting kids know what you could and could not do," Oommittuk explains.

Point Hope has long been well known as a place that has kept its traditions strong - a place where the skin boat is still used to hunt whales and where, for long after the arrival of CB, VHF and Coleman stoves, whale hunters have continued to communicate camp to camp by signaling with their paddles; where seal-oil stoves can still be found in whaling tents. When one hears the drums of Point Hope, he is hearing the bowhead whale, as drummers there have rejected nylon drum skins and continue to use membrane of bowhead liver to cover their drums.

"In a lot of other places the dances had died, but Point Hope kept going and going," Oommittuk says. "Now you see it deteriorating as the elders go - slowly, slowly."

It's not only the songs and dances that Oommittuk worries about, but all the traditions that are done nowhere else, that make Point Hope unique, such as the "born of the ice." When a whale is caught, its tail is cut off and then brought to a place near the captains ice cellar. A hole is dug and lined with bowhead blubber. The tail is placed on the blubber, then covered with another layer. It is then buried, and covered with ice to protect it from polar bears. "And then summertime and fall time will come, and then, when the first slush ice touches the land, that's 'the born of the ice,' Oommittuk explains "That's when we pull the whale's tail up. It's been fermenting with the blubber and it's a real delicacy. We eat the blubber with frozen fish, with caribou, with anything like that. Or we eat it by itself. It's strong, you can't eat too much of it." If more than five whale's are caught, tails six and up remain buried until March, when they are pulled up, cleaned and eaten to begin the new whaling season. "the taste is even stronger now," Oommittuk says.

Throughout the year, many special events happen and all deal with whale hunting. Ceremonies accompany the whaling feasts of Nalukataq, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Christmas Day begins with a communal whaling feast at the school gym, followed by a visit from Santa Claus. Then, the Eskimo games begin a week of friendly competition when the two clans of the village face each other in the kind traditional games of strength and endurance that the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics is modeled after. The games are launched by a tug-of-war between the women of each clan and then the men. Just for fun, other games are played as well, with contestants grouped by age, ranging from toddlers to the eldest of Elders, and cash prizes are generously awarded. Shortly after Christmas, there is a break in the games as the two clans gather in the gym to feed each other.

On New Year's Eve a sacred, ceremony called "Old Custom Dance" is staged. The songs and dances seen and heard here are performed only at this time and their origins precede the western calendar. While the performance entertains, it is also very serious and reminds the people of the importance of the animals, and it also foretells whether whaling and hunting in the New Year will be abundant or scarce.

Cameras and other recording devices have never been allowed at Old Custom, but now Charlie Kinneveuk, the 68-year old IRA Tribal Council President who is the keeper of Old Custom, has grown worried that when he goes, there will be no one left to keep the ceremony going. In the hope that doing so might raise the interest of the young people and encourage them to learn the Old Custom Dances, take over, and keep the ceremony alive for all time, Charlie invited the photographer who puts this publication together to come to the most recent ceremony. "It's very important that these Old Custom Dances are documented," Charlie explains, "for the children of Point Hope, to help them watch, listen, and learn the Old Custom Dances."



Message from the Board President:

Weatherization works! Energy solutions for rural Alaska



by Andrew Ebona

Raise your hand if you're paying more than \$2.25 for a gallon of gas. Keep your hand up if you're paying more than \$3.50 a gallon. How many of you are paying over \$5.00 a gallon? And let's not forget those who are paying \$6.00 and more a gallon.

It's no surprise to rural Alaskans that fuel prices are through the roof.

Unfortunately, America and the rest of the global economy is completely fuel dependent. We rely on fuel to heat our homes and to run our vehicles. In rural Alaska, we need fuel to operate our boats so we can check our nets, and in some communities, so we can check our mail. Even the cost of food is going up because it costs so much more to barge or fly it in. These out of control price increases are reeking havoc on rural villages.

But this isn't the first time that we have faced a rise in energy prices.

In the 1970's skyrocketing fuel costs were caused by the oil embargo. It was at the height of the energy cost increases of the mid-1970's that RurAL CAP tried something that most people thought was crazy – we began to weatherize homes. RurAL CAP made energy-efficient improvements to qualified low-income households. It upgraded insulation, reduced air leaks in homes, tested and replaced old heaters with energy-saving models, installed new doors and windows, and made homes more fire

safe. Through the weatherization program, people saved hundreds of dollars on their annual heating costs.

Today, weatherization is one of the RurAL CAP's longest running programs. In 2005, RurAL CAP weatherized a total of 98 homes in seven communities. Homeowners averaged a 31% savings in energy costs and a 50% decrease in heating bills. Since the program began, RurAL CAP has weatherized more than 8,000 homes.

You may be wondering if your community qualifies to receive weatherization services from RurAL CAP. RurAL CAP is one of a handful of organizations that weatherize homes in Alaska. RurAL CAP provides weatherization services in Western and Northwestern Alaska as well as in the City and Borough of Juneau. The Alaska Community Development Corporation (ACDC), Interior Weatherization, the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), and the Tanana Chiefs Conference also weatherize homes. Other organizations provide housing and weatherization services with funding from the Native American Housing and Self Determination Act (NAHAS-DA).

If you live in a community in Western or Northwestern Alaska, you may be wondering "how do we get RurAL CAP to weatherize our homes?" The first step is to find out if your community has received weatherization services in the past 13 years. Under RurAL CAP funding guidelines, only communities that have not had weatherization services since 1993 are eligible to apply.

The second step is to have your community pass a resolution requesting RurAL CAP to provide weatherization services in your village. RurAL CAP's weatherization program has sample resolutions available for communities to reference as they draft their resolution. Your community should then submit its resolution to RurAL CAP.

RurAL CAP reviews the resolutions and prioritizes them by lowest medium income. RurAL CAP then submits the resolutions to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) to request permission to serve the communities. AHFC develops priorities based on need, size of community, and availability of funds. AHFC then authorizes RurAL CAP to weatherize their prioritized communities. Once authorized, RurAL

CAP works closely with communities to implement the weatherization program in their village.

Currently, the State of Alaska is examining the possibility of increasing its portion of funding to weatherization programs. This much needed funding would allow weatherization programs across Alaska to reach more low-income households.

RurAL CAP's weatherization program helped hundreds of Alaskans to survive the energy crisis of the 1970's and has saved thousands of Alaskans money each year in heating costs.

You may be also asking yourself, "what can I do to weatherize my home?" There are many inexpensive and easy things that you can do to make your home more energy efficient. One of the easiest ways to save energy and money is to clean the dust off your refrigerator's coils twice a year. Cleaning the coils can reduce the amount of electricity your refrigerator uses by up to 20%!

You can also increase your homes energy-efficiency by sealing up air leaks. Caulk and weatherstrip doors and windows that leak air. Caulk and weatherstripping are common household items available in the home section of most stores.

By caulking all plywood joints and holes in the ceiling you will keep the heat inside the house instead of flowing into the attic. Caulking holes in the ceiling can also help keep moisture from getting into the attic and causing frost that melts and rains back down after a long cold spell. Keep your attic access closed – taping it shut will help to keep warm air in the house from getting into the attic.

Put outlet gaskets behind covers on all outlets that are on exterior walls. Outlets and switches cause many homes to be drafty. Windows are also notorious places for drafts to occur in a home. If you have leaky windows tape plastic over the window in the winter months. The plastic (available in most home stores) will cut down on the draft and also act as a storm window.

Water heating is generally the third largest energy expense in your home, typically accounting for about 14% of your utility bill. By taking shorter showers, installing more efficient showerheads and lowering the thermostat on your water heater you can decrease your utility bill. Another great energy saving tip is to insulate

your electric water heater with an insulating blanket. These blankets are available in most home sections of stores and can save up to 10% of the energy used by an electric water heater.

Another great energy saving tip is to install compact fluorescent light bulbs in the fixtures that are used the most -- especially any that are on more than 3 to 4 hours a day. They will cost more up front, but cut electricity use by more than half. Plus they last a lot longer before burning out.

As you brace yourself for your next heating bill, please remember that weatherizing your home and making small changes in energy use can go a long way.

Weatherization Service Providers:

Alaska Community Development Corporation

(907) 746-5680
(800) 478-8080
Service Area:
Mat-Su Borough
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Copper River Valley
Southeast Alaska (except Juneau)
Bristol Bay
Prince William Sound
Aleutians

Interior Weatherization

(907) 452-5353
(800) 478-5323
Service Area:
Fairbanks/NSB
On the Road System:
South to Cantwell
East to Delta Junction

Municipality of Anchorage

(907) 343-4881
Service Area:
Municipality of Anchorage

RurAL CAP

(907) 279-2511
(800) 478-7227
Service Area:
Western Alaska
Northwestern Alaska
City and Borough of Juneau

Tanana Chiefs Conference

(907) 452-8251
(800) 478-6822
Service Area:
Interior Alaska

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Village Voices Rural Alaska Community Action Program

ruralcap.com

731 E. 8th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 279 - 2511

Andrew Ebona President
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Message from the Executive Director:

AmeriCorps gets things done

The spirit of service is strong across rural Alaska



by David Hardenbergh

As rural Alaska evolves through this age of high-speed communication and higher-speed living, it's good to know that some of Alaska's oldest traditions are still strong. Traditional dance groups are thriving. In some regions there is renewed interest in Native languages. Traditional healing practices are being taught. And the tradition of giving back to one's community is also experiencing a renaissance in rural Alaska.

For thousands of years, Alaska Natives survived and thrived in part because they took care of the earth and took care of each other. Giving back to one's community, whether through a potlatch or by providing for Elders, was an integral part of the fabric of life. That spirit of service and desire to give back to one's community is still strong across rural Alaska. One of the forms it now takes in communities from Klawock to Kiana is through service as an AmeriCorps or VISTA member.

RurAL CAP's history with national service programs goes back to the 1970's when the agency supported VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) members working in rural Alaska. In the mid 1990's, RurAL CAP became one of the first community-based, nonprofit organizations in Alaska to run a new national service program known as AmeriCorps.

Under the current AmeriCorps and

VISTA programs at RurAL CAP, members are recruited to work in their own communities with sponsorship from the tribe, city council or other local organization. Members commit to performing a year of full-time community service work in areas such as youth development, public health and wellness, child development, energy conservation, solid waste management, and environmental education.

In turn, the members receive a monthly living allowance and an education award upon completion of their service. Since 1995, more than 500 AmeriCorps and VISTA members have served their communities through RurAL CAP programs.

On February 3, 2006, a Graduation and Swearing-In Ceremony was held at the Alaska Native Heritage Center for members of the RurAL CAP BIRCH (Building Initiatives in Rural Community Health) and RAVEN (Rural Alaska Village Environmental Network) AmeriCorps programs. RurAL CAP's Deputy Director, Shauna Hegna, moderated the event. Representative Mary Kapsner gave the keynote address and the swearing-in was conducted by William C. Noll, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development and Elsa Sargento, Executive Director of the Alaska State Community Service Commission.

Perhaps the most moving speeches of the ceremony were given by two current AmeriCorps members who have completed one year of service and committed to a second year.

Anna May Ferguson, a BIRCH AmeriCorps member, coordinated some 66 activities and events in her community of Togiak including a community wellness circle focused on tobacco cessation and youth underage drinking prevention and leadership activities.

Byron Stephanoff, a RAVEN AmeriCorps member from Russian Mission, talked about establishing a backhaul program to get rid of dead vehicles in his community and how he wants to serve for another year to finish the job. According to Byron, "I've changed a whole lot, from knowing hardly anything to having vast knowledge of environmental issues in Russian Mission. AmeriCorps got me into things I never knew I would ever do. Even one person in a community can make a change."

The power of the idea that even one person can make a change in a community is exemplified in the experience and the accomplishments of AmeriCorps members across the state. 2005 RAVEN AmeriCorps members:

- Dedicated more than 27,527 hours of their time to addressing community environmental and health issues.
- Recruited 2,422 community volunteers who completed 30,028 hours of community service. Activities included:
- Community clean-ups;
- Collecting recyclables;
- Environmental education activities;
- Fire safety and prevention education;
- Indoor air quality home visits;
- Health fairs; and
- Hosting healthy activities for youth.

- Diverted 22,077 pounds of solid waste from local dumps/landfills including:
- 8,569 pounds of aluminum;
- 7,509 pounds of aluminum shipped to recycling centers;
- 9,603 pounds of lead/acid batteries for backhaul and recycling; and
- 2,885 pounds of plastic, paper/cardboard, and oil for recycling.

- Collected 45,742 pounds of litter, trash, and junked vehicles for proper disposal and backhaul.
- Hosted 543 healthy activities for youth that incorporated traditional values and addressed environmental education. Over 3,855 youth, adults, and elders were involved.

With their focus on public health, substance abuse prevention and youth leadership development, the members of the 2005 BIRCH AmeriCorps program:

- Dedicated more than 23,540 hours of their time to addressing community health and wellness issues.
- Recruited 2,699 community volunteers who completed 21,996 hours of community service. Activities included:

- Community clean-ups;
- Collecting recyclables;
- Fire safety and prevention education;
- Indoor air quality home visits;
- Health fairs; and
- Hosting healthy activities for youth.
- Hosted 894 healthy activities for



RurAL CAP: Healthy People,
Sustainable Communities,
Vibrant Cultures.

youth that incorporated traditional values and addressed environmental education. Over 4,000 youth, adults, and elders were involved.

All 35 AmeriCorps members in the 2005 BIRCH and RAVEN programs reported improving six or more professional, technical, and personal skills during their year of service. Through their year of AmeriCorps service, all of these members have become more respected as leaders in their communities.

Whether they serve in order to give something back to their communities or to use this opportunity to further their own education and career, AmeriCorps and VISTA members are accomplishing great things in rural Alaska. They truly are getting things done!

RurAL CAP held a graduation ceremony Feb. 3, 2006 at the Alaska Native Heritage Center to recognize 27 AmeriCorps members statewide who have completed their year of service in Alaska through the Building Initiatives in Rural Community Health (BIRCH) and Rural Alaska Village Environmental Network (RAVEN) programs. A swearing-in event honored 35 AmeriCorps members as they commit themselves to a year of service in rural Alaska. They included: Sheena Whitley, Lorraine Brown, Valentino Burratin, Joie Brown, Byron Stephanoff, Jacob Turet, Jonathan Titus, Stella Estrada, Charlotte Davis, Robin Goodlataw, Anna May Ferguson, Carrie Harried, Simeon Housler, Larissa "Lisa" Jimmy, Darlene Mathew, Fortuna Manumik, Mary Kennedy, Raissa Ukatish, Jill Boskofska, James Angiak, Chris Thorne, Connie Ferguson, Stacey Tumblo, Cheryl Dewitt, Bryson Kanrilak, Pearl Henry, Kemberly Henry, Winnie Xavier, Theresa Kelly, Joan McBeen, Dimitra Lavrakas, Denny Thomas, Jedidia Aitchak, Stephen Gregory and Kimberly Oxereok.

AmeriCorps members get sworn in for a year of community service.





To keep the sacred, Old Custom Dance ceremony alive and strong:

A call from a puppet master to the young

On Oviok first saw the Old Custom dances of Tikigaq in the early 1950's, when he was boy. First, he heard the powerful, reverential opening song, when the performers on stage mimicked the calls of the seals, the walrus, the caribou, ducks, geese - all the animals that gave his people life - and the bowhead whale itself was heard in vibrating liver-skins of the dance drums. Oviok saw the dance of the Chief of All Chiefs, and all the performances, each separated by the drawing of a curtain; he witnessed the sacred moment when the top was spun and the down flew off.

Towards the end of the program, the curtain opened up to a very curious sight. Sitting on a stool in front of the singers was what appeared to be a man wearing a mask. The man sat very, very still, not moving, not even flinching. "I keep looking at it for a long time to see if it was a person or not. It didn't really move," Oviok recalls, "but the singers and the

drummers were the ones it was listening to."

Then, in the second song, the sitting dancer began to move, to turn his head, to raise and drop his arms in the motion of dance, and by the third song, he was dancing strong, stomping his feet in the powerful manner of the Inupiaq man.

"Hey! That must be a person!" Oviok thought.

After the performance ended, Oviok was surprised to learn that the dancer was not a person at all, but a human-sized puppet.

The next year, Oviok again attended the performance and when the curtain on the Browning Hall stage opened to what appeared to be the same figure, he was pleased that this time, he knew what he was seeing. "I know that puppet is going to dance again. I better go up closer!" Just like before, the puppet's first dance was motionless; he sat perfectly still as he listened to the song. Once he got going, his motions were in the exact

same puppet style as they had been the year before.

"I know that's a puppet!" Oviok thought, but when the dance ended, the puppet stood up - and there were no strings attached to him. "I found out that puppet is a person now. It was Charlie!" Oviok chuckles.

That would be Charlie Kinneveauk, President of the Point Hope IRA Tribal Council, who, along with his brother Leo, has become the keeper of this ancient and sacred performance.

When they were small, their dad, Herbert Kinneveauk, taught Charlie and Leo survival skills, like how to hunt a seal. "He would give us each four bullets," Charlie remembers.

"He would make sure each of us catch one or two, and that not one of us catch more," Leo adds. "He would try to make us equal."

He also taught the boys how to sneak up a seal lying on the ice, and then to grab it by the tail before it could disappear into its hole.

They learned to hunt ducks and geese with the traditional bolo-like weighted sling that they would throw, ensnaring the birds.

Charlie fondly remembers being at camp when his Dad was making an ice-cellar. His dad would go down into the ground to chip away at the ice and when he had chipped enough to fill his buckets, Charlie and Leo would pull them up with a rope.

Between bucket loads, the brothers would wander a ways from the camp to hunt birds, stopping now and then to put their ears to the tundra. If they heard the chipping noise coming through the ground, they knew their father was still chipping and they could hunt more. If they heard nothing, they would rush back to grab the rope and haul the chipped ice out of the cellar.

They gained other knowledge from their father - and their mother Laura - as well.

"My Dad was always a drummer and a dancer from the Point Hope

"I could see that some of those parts of the snowmachine would be perfect to use with the puppet, like the shaft that fits the bearing - I could see that I could use them to make a puppet move." - Charlie Kinneveauk

dance group," Leo explains. "Whenever there's any kind of dancing going on, he's always there, drumming and dancing. You know, my dad worries a lot, too; my parents both worry a lot about us when we're playing out, they'd rather have us in the building."

So whenever there was drumming going on, the Kinneveauk parents kept Charlie and Leo safe within the sound of the drumbeat. "A lot of the songs that we are singing right now, we picked up from our Dad, by being there all the time whenever there's an Eskimo Dance going on," Leo says.

"Even when we were home, when Dad's not working on other things he'd be singing some songs, too. Without anything else in the house - no TV, radio, or anything like that - we could hear my Dad singing. Lot of times I would learn little bit of that song. That's how Charlie and I learned most the songs, because of our Dad."

Their father, an ordained minister in the Episcopal Church, would often sing "Eskimo religious songs" - hymns translated into Inupiaq, as well. "Our mother, I know she knows a lot of songs too; when we're at home she would sing a song or two which they don't sing at all at common dances."

Old Custom was performed on New Year's Eve. "The songs are only sung once a year, and the program is shown only once a year, and the songs are not used for common dances, motion dances, or any other dance. No one really knows exactly how old these songs are. One of our elders that passed on said that these were passed on from many, many, many midnight suns ago. That's how he termed it," Leo says.

Each Christmas season, as New Year's approached, their Dad would bring out the human puppet, a fox puppet and all the masks and head-dresses to make certain that everything worked properly. Then the sleds would be loaded, the dogs hitched up and everyone would travel the one mile to Browning Hall, on the Episcopal Church grounds, where many teams of barking, howling dogs would be tied.

The brothers explain that the Church was so far from the village because when the first missionary came, hoping to counteract social problems brought in through the nearby commercial whaling station called Jabbertown, he had been frightened of the people.

Their father's father had been his first convert. The brothers are grateful to the missionary and his church, because elsewhere in the region, missionaries banned Eskimo dancing, as did the Friends in Kotzebue and the Kobuk River villages. The Old Custom would be performed on a stage in the hall and then the people would return to the village for a traditional gift-giving ceremony done in disguise.

"After the ceremonial dances were over, we're done with it," Leo recollects. "My dad would take all the equipment to his house and store them away. And we'd never get close or touch them at all. The only time that we would see them was when he does repair work, especially before the day of the ceremonial dances, to make sure everything worked properly."



Opposite page: Charlie Kinneveauk studies the puppet, *Sauyaglqaq*, after removing it from the wooden box it had been for the past year. Top: Charlie with some of the masks that will be used in the upcoming Old Custom Dance performance. Bottom: Charlie and Leo pose with framed pictures of their parents, Herbert and Laura Kinneveauk, who they credit with bringing them up in a good, strong, cultural environment in which they were able to learn their Inupiaq ways, including the song and dance skills they now perform at the Old Custom Dances.

One year, the baleen neck of the puppet broke and it could not dance. So his elders turned to Charlie, who began dancing Old Custom when he was "six or seven. They want me to be a puppet," Charlie remembers. "We call it in two ways *Sauyaglqaq* and *Anayakkiq* Those two, either one. So one time I was called by my Dad and Bob Tuzroyluk. They show me how the puppet is supposed to just sit there during the first song. The second song, it just start little bit, the leg, and the head, a little bit. The third song, it start moving around. So from then on, after I learned the motions, I started to have to perform with the group as that puppet. So I enjoyed it, especially with the mask, when I look at the audience, they sure always watch. Even when I smile at them, my face was covered with a mask."

They taught him other dances, too, like the loon dance. "I did quite a few, I watch the Old Custom Dances since then."

Except to watch, Leo did not get involved in Old Custom as a child. During his high school years at Mt. Edgecumbe, he did not even see the performances at all. After graduating, Leo enrolled in Haskell Institute in Kansas and there he found himself with a strong desire to witness the dances again. "I stayed home one semester just to watch the Old Custom Dances being held," he recalls, "and then, at Browning Hall, before they started, (the late) David Frankson came over to me - he was one of the main drummers and singers - and he asked me to be the announcer."

"Here, I wanted to watch!" Between each scene, David would explain the next act to Leo in Inupiaq. "When they open the curtains, I'd tell the audience about each scene in English and Inupiaq," Leo remembers. "I feel maybe ten feet tall, being there. I'm glad David Frankson called on me that day, because he knows about the Old Custom Dances and I learned a little bit about what's going on."

In the years to come, Leo became both a performer and an announcer.

Sometime after Charlie had become a man, he decided that it was time for a real puppet to dance again.

"I was sure that I could make a better puppet, a puppet that could do much better movement," he explains. "I measure myself exactly - the size of my arm and legs." In addition to the baleen, wood and fur of old, "I could see that some of those parts of the snowmachine would be perfect to use with the puppet, like the shaft that fits the bearing - I could see that I could use them to make a puppet move." And so he did, with no instruction manual. "I've seen that old puppet before," he dismisses the complexity of the task, "and I know exactly where all these strings were." When it was finished, the puppet wore a pair of Charlie's mukluks and a parka that had belonged to Herbert Kinneveauk, Jr. His sisters, Aileen Tingok and Irma Hunnicutt, sewed most of the rest of the clothing from caribou skins and he used the same mask that was worn by the original puppet.

"That was a relief for me," Charlie recalls his feelings upon completing the puppet, "so I won't have to be a



It's all about whaling

Whaling – it's all about whaling," Leo says of the Old Custom Dances – and the same is true for so much of what takes place during the year, whether it is the "born of the ice," the hunting of the bearded seal, the preparation of the skins and the skinning of the boat, or of Qagrugvik, Point Hope's Nalukataq. "All year, the village prepares for the whale to come," Leo explains. "The food cellars are cleaned out, because we have to respect the whale. That's how important whaling is to our lives here. There is lot of celebration after a whale is caught, and some dancing. Even our Old Custom dances, they pertain to our whaling – to good fortune for the people of Point Hope, to good whale hunting.

"If whaling is ever lost in our culture, part of our culture will be lost, because we live by it. That's our main survival here in Point Hope."

In the spring of 1991, the photographer and writer who now serves as the staff of this publication had the privilege of following the Point Hope crew of Elijah Rock as they hunted and landed a whale. Among the images he got that year was the one above, of Leo and Charlie and their crew paddling towards a bowhead that happened to surface in front of them as they headed off to help the late Henry Nashookpuk land a bowhead that he had just harpooned. This whale dove before they could reach it.

During the 1991 Qagrugvik, Patrick Attungana, seen at right, offered a prayer for the whales. Attungana was the last of a generation that has now just about completely passed. When he died, he left Old Custom to the care of Charlie and Leo and all the drummers and singers who help them. Now, a new generation must learn. Their turn is next. When this photographer finished that 1991 project, he thought that he had covered the Point Hope whale hunt and was done. Yet, upon returning to photograph Old Custom at Charlie's invitation, he realized that he had barely begun and that there is a whole, beautiful, wonderful, strong but threatened process that must be documented, and so he commits himself to it - not as a *Village Voices*, but rather a personal project, although small pieces of it could wind up in the pages of this publication.



Sometimes, Charlie thinks about retiring

continued from page 8

puppet anymore." There is another puppet in Old Custom, one that represents a fox and all the animals of the region. The time came when it, too, needed to be replaced. Charlie caught a marmot and used its skin to make a new fox puppet. Several masks and headdresses are used in Old Custom. Some are very old, with newer ones made by Charlie.

In the decades since, much has changed. The old Browning Hall

burned down in the mid-70's and the performance is now held in the high school gymnasium on a portable stage that is folded up and put away afterward.

The most important change is the passing of a strong and knowledgeable generation of elders who once oversaw the cultural life of Point Hope. Several among them knew the Old Custom, but when Patrick Attungana passed away in the mid-90's, Charlie was the only one left

who had all the knowledge necessary to direct the Old Custom ceremonies.

"These Old Custom dances have to keep going," Charlie says. "It's very important that it is documented so the young generation could take on and do this many more years. I'm 68 years old now, I have a few more years to live. When I think about it, it take lots of time to get that thing going. Sometimes I feel like retiring from all this. I think if I should retire, I would just turn the whole thing over

to Popsi, or maybe Leo."

On hearing that, Leo leans over and pats Charlie on the shoulder. "You're not going to retire, Charlie," he says, affectionately. "Don't even think about retiring yet. This is something you love."

Charlie smiles reflectively. "Yea," he agrees. "It is."



Even in sudden sorrow...

Cycle of life must continue

On the afternoon of the last day of 2005, Charlie walked the short distance from his house to the school gymnasium, where he was met by several others who had come to help. The many pieces of the portable stage were wheeled into the gym and assembled. Charlie was meticulous in his oversight of the set-up. When the motions of the animal puppet were not so smooth as he demanded, he called for several readjustments. "Everything must be just right!" he insisted.

Finally, everything was just right and everyone went home for a break.

In the evening, as the singers and dancers gathered for the performance, they heard the tragic news that a much beloved young Point Hope woman, Patricia Stone, had just lost her life in a car accident. The happy mood turned mournful and somber. Then there was a quiet discussion about how to proceed.

"In the past," Steve Oommittuk sums up that discussion, "it was always told that we had to keep going no matter what. There's been some



whaling captains' death in the feast-time. One time, I thought they were going to cancel, but the elders said, "this is a cycle of life that has to be done. This is a whaling ceremonial that needs to continue; we have to

finish these cycles, no matter how tough it is, even though we are hurting inside. We can't change what has happened in our village. We have to continue, to finish the cycle. Then we can mourn."

Top: As Charlie intently oversees, Steve Oommittuk tests out the controls for the animal puppet. **Bottom:** upon learning of a tragic death in the village, Old Custom dancers solemnly ponder how best to proceed.

Scene I: Honoring the Animals



The curtain opens on Scene I to reveal Leo, who once again serves as the announce: "We'd like to present to you the Old Custom dances which were handed down to us by our ancestors. Like one of our Elders said, it has been many, many, many midnight suns ago. No one knows exactly how long, only the sun and the moon know how old they are. The whole ceremonial dance revolves around our hunting activities here in Point Hope." Leo explains the first scene: "there will be all kinds of animal sounds, the sea animal, the land animal, the birds our ancestors have always depended on." The sounds that follow are rich and powerful, as the mimicked calls of all these animals mix with the beat of the whale-liver membrane skins of the drums.

Scene II: Chief of All Chiefs

As he will before each scene that follows, Leo explains the next set of songs and dances: "Our next scene is called, *Uutaġtuġiaq* – the Chief of all Chiefs of Point Hope will perform a dance, there will be a candle in front and the chief will be in a sitting position. He will douse the lamp and then dance after he puts the lamp out." Ron Oviok, below, then dances the roll of the Chief of All Chiefs.



Henry Attungana Jr. tells the story of the two hunters in dance.

Scene III: Two Brothers Go Hunting (*Tinġaaq*)

Once upon a time, two brothers went out hunting down on the sea and one brother got lost while they were hunting and so his brother looked everywhere. He looked underground, he looked all over, and pretty soon he found out that the Northern Lights had taken off with his brother."



Scene IV: Chief Dances with Wives

Elijah Rock performs the roll of the Chief of Point Hope. Irma Hunicutt (left) and Pikok Tuzroyluk dance as his two wives.

The next scene is called *Qanugatumii*. The Chief of Point Hope with his two wives would occasionally perform for the village people.”

“ I always tell the young people that they need to listen, watch, that’s how we learn, like Leo and I, we just watch, we listen, we sing. I would hope they would do the same thing instead of watching TV and stuff like that all the time, and that they would get the hang of this Old Custom Dance, and that they would continue it. Listen! Listen! Watch! Practice! They’re smart, they’re smart kids! All they need to do is just listen, watch and learn to do it.”

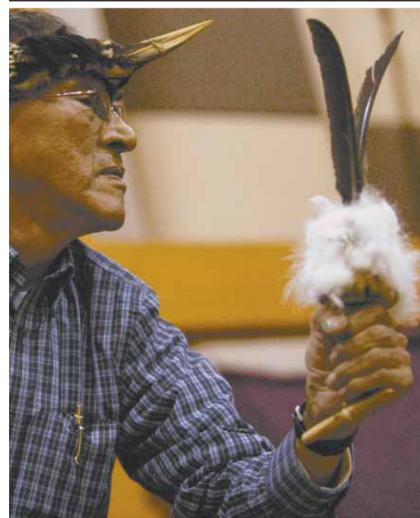
Charlie Kinneeveauk



Wearing a loon headdress, Jacob Lane Jr., does the King Loon Dance

Scene V: King Loon

Our next scene is called, *Magpiŋmii*, The King Loon Dance: there was a loon, merrily dancing after a successful catch of fish for his young one."



Scene VI: Top Dance

Our next scene is the Top Dance, *Kiavsag*. You know, if there will be a man, spinning a top and if the feathers fly off from the top, it means good fortune for the village of Point Hope."

Also wearing a loon headdress, Leo goes through the motions of the top dance (opposite page) then pulls the string that spins the top. The feathers fly off, signaling good hunting, good whaling, in the year to come.

In an interview, Leo said, "When they first started doing that top dance, I guess they selected an older person to do it, because if the feathers don't fly off right, then either the performer or their relative would die, pass away, so they selected an older person. So it is kind of scary."

"Well, the feather's fly off. You'll be okay," Charlie assured him.





Scene VIII:
Two Women
try to Cook
Without Pots

Once upon a time there was a woman who tried to cook without pots and pans. You will see two men behind the performers here, dancing. *Qitaktaq.*”

Opposite page: Earl Kingik and Henry Attungana Jr. peek their heads up from behind the women singers while doing the dance that tells the story of the two women who tried to cook without pots.

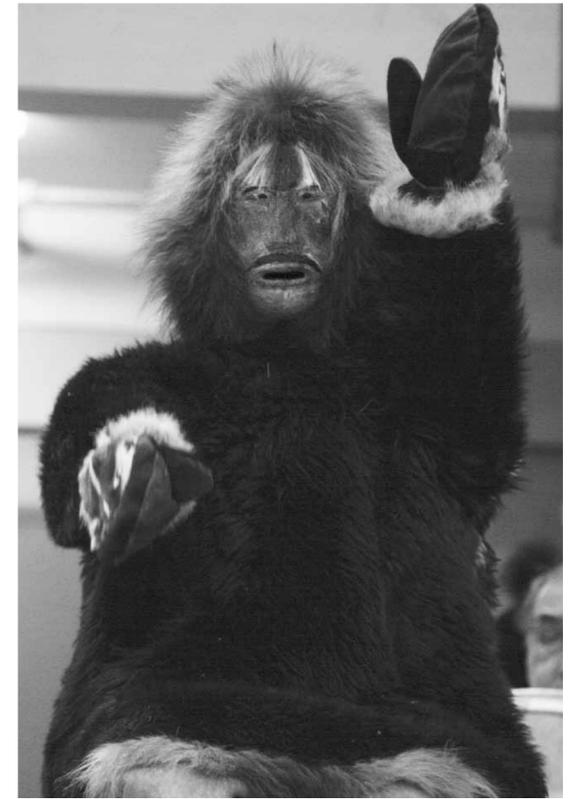
Scene VII:
Wishing
Dance

In our next scene, you will be observing two ladies dancing behind the drummers. This is the wishing dance for a successful whaling season here in Point Hope.”

Irma Hunnicutt (above) and Annie Attungana (right) perform the wishing dance.



Scene IX: The Puppet Dance



After sitting perfectly still through one song, *Sauyaglqaq* starts dancing in the second and then goes after the ball. In the end, the fox takes the ball away (inset).



Our next scene is called *Sauyaglqaq*. It's a puppet show... Once upon a time this one man went out hunting on the ice and while he was down there hunting, he ran into a strange fellow, a strange man; he had never seen that kind of person before. So this man invited him to go under the ice-berg. Out of curiosity, this man followed him. They went under the ice berg and then they walk a ways and they came to a ceremonial house. When the man opened the door and went inside, he noticed that there were people inside with polar bear noses and these people with polar bear noses start telling this person from Tikigaaq to learn some songs so that when he get back to his home village he could teach the songs, if they want a nice weather or if they want to change into a polar bear or if they want to sing for any kind they could sing these songs...

"When he came back to Point Hope he taught the songs to his hometown people. There's three songs. One is when *Sauyaglqaq* seem like start coming back to life. Then in the second song, there will be a little balloon, a bladder, hanging down from the string and *Sauyaglqaq* will be going after that little ball. And then there will be a young fox, you will notice, coming back and forth out of the hole

"And the only thing that young fox is going after is the ball, so at the end you will see the young fox finally gets the ball. *Sauyaglqaq!*"



Scene X: The Woman Who Would Not Marry

Our final scene is called, *Uyalu*. Once upon a time there was a woman that does not like to get married. These men from all over came to her and proposed to her but she refused them all. She didn't like to get married. So her grandmother finally came and told the young woman, that 'you rejected my son. Maybe its me that you would like to get married to.' That's when the young woman started getting scared and the old woman chased her away."

Various suitors try to romance the woman, but she refuses them all.



"I hope our youngsters keep this Old Custom dance going all the way through until the world ends. That's why we're happy, always happy, here in our community, whenever we perform these Old Custom dances - to have a good future life."

Ron Oviok

Time to begin a New Year...



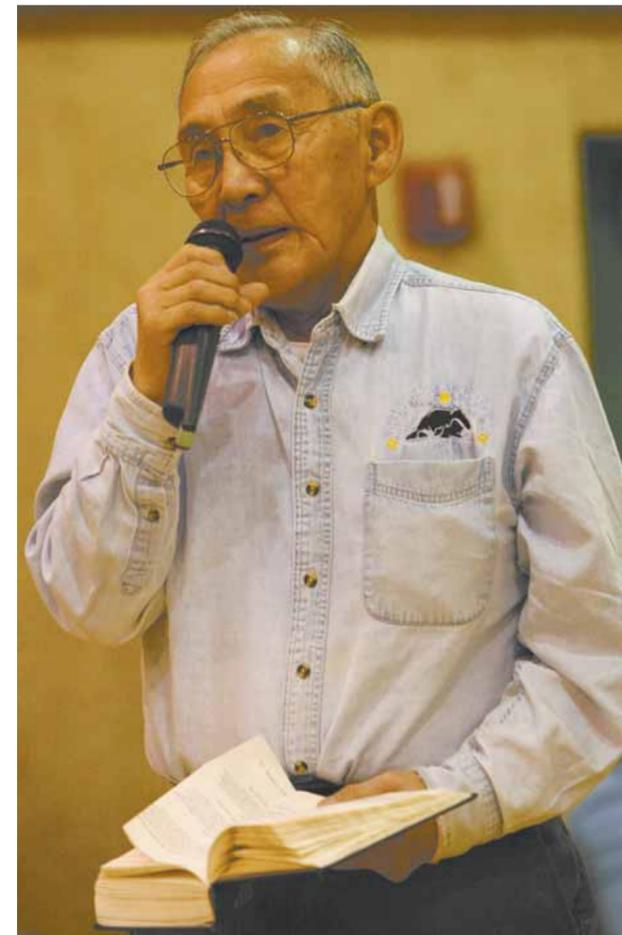
After the performance ends, the Old Custom Dance drummers and singers stand and sing, "Joy to the World," in Iñupiaq.

At this time I'd like to recognize my brother Charlie Kinneveauk for being the puppet master. Thanks to Charlie, that he was able to revive the Old Custom Dance equipment. It takes a lot of engineering, with all that stuff you need to know about it."



In appreciation for what he has done to keep the Old Custom dances alive and strong, Dorcas Rock gives Charlie a hug - and a kiss on the cheek.

...with gifts for their umas



In the Iñupiaq way, names are handed down, always keeping something of the original name holder alive. When two people have the same name, they are "atiqs," and the spouse of one's atiq is his or her "uma." Atiqs and umas are considered to be important relatives, and there are songs to sing to them. On New Year's eve, after the Old Custom Dances, people dress in disguise and then seek out their umas to give them gifts (top). This year, at the end of the ceremonies, The Reverend Elijah Attungana (left) speaks of the sorrow the community feels on this night when a loved one has been lost, then offers a prayer. Afterwards, those present extend their hands one to another, wishing each other a happy new year (directly above).



Out of sight for another year

Back into the box

On New Year's day, Charlie's brother Leo and his friend and fellow Old Custom dancer Earl Kingik, better known in the village as "Natchiq," which means seal, come by to help him put Sooyalllllll back into his box. First, they must carefully examine the strings and all the moving parts to make certain everything is in good working order and that it will be packed properly.

"We'll see you next year," Charlie says, just before the box is closed.

"Yeah, See you next year, buddy!" Earl says.

The lid is then closed and *Sauyaglqaq*, the puppet, is moved to a secure place, there to remain until it is time for him to dance again.

