

Wolf dance to be held for first time in 50 years

By Bill Hess

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An Eskimo ceremony which has not been seen publicly since Charles Lindberg flew into Alaska in 1932 will be performed in Nome on February 22. The Wolf Dance of the King Island people will be seen then by participants in the 1982 Bering Straits Elders Conference.

"This is one of the greatest get-together dances there is," says Paul Inulana, who was a boy of 11 when the dance was performed for Lindberg, and who has been trying to revive it for the past 15 years. "This will help develop more friendship among our people. We will have a competition in gifts." Many gifts will be exchanged, says Inulana, between what he calls cross cousins, such as the children of one father and sister.

Referring to the wolf ceremony merely as a dance does not do it full justice. It is much more, Inulana notes that almost the entire village of King Island is involved in bringing it back to life. For many, the things they are learning is an education in their traditional culture, and they are being reminded of important ties between relatives which are sometimes overlooked in modern life.

"It's great that we are getting to do it now," says Inulana, who has been living in Anchorage for the past fourteen years, but who returned to Nome to get the performance organized. "If we didn't do it this year, we would have lost it." Inulana stresses that there are only a very few of the old people who remember how the dance is done, such as Frank Ellanna, 83, and his friend, Joachim Kovuk, and Aloysius Pikoneana and Clara Sikloak. All are over 70.

The performance is being staged with the aid of a grant of \$76,590 from the National Arts Center and the National Endowment for Arts.

This came about after Inulana met the director of Folklife, Inc., out of Washington, D.C., as she had the opportunity to see the King Island dancers perform. She was so impressed that she encouraged Inulana to apply for a grant. He did, with the close help of Susie Jones of the Alaska State Council on the Arts.

The King Island Native Association is providing another \$8,000, and the King Island people themselves are contributing about \$12,000 in in-kind services. They have been gathering driftwood for drum frames, ceremonial gifts and

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the stage set, preparing fish, seal, and walrus meat, gathering berries and willow leaves, preparing skins and furs, and sewing mukluks and traditional clothing.

The dance tells the story of a hunter who is given instructions by an eagle. A special water-filled wooden drum is needed, along with regular skin drums. There are four main dancers who wear wolf heads and enter the stage setting through four ceremonial doors. Feather head-dresses are also worn at different times during the performance.

Tiulana stresses that much practice is being put into the performance, as everything must be done just right.

The first production in Nome on February 22 will be for the Bering Straits Elders Conference. Later, it will hopefully be performed in different locations throughout Alaska.