

Four Alaskans to get honorary degrees

FAIRBANKS — Four Alaskans, whose service to their fellow Alaskans totals more than 16 decades will receive honorary doctorates from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks at the university's May 10 commencement exercises.

Receiving the degrees will be Harold Kaveolook of Kaktovik, Sadie Neakok of Barrow, Walter Teeland of Wasilla and Florence Weber of Fairbanks.



Mae and Harold Kaveolook.

photo by Bill Hess

Kaveolook is an educator who will receive an honorary Doctor of Education degree. Born during World War I, he didn't enter school until he was 11.

After completing his elementary education at Point Barrow, he attended the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school at Eklutna.

Kaveolook began his teaching career in Kaktovik on Barter Island in 1951 after being recruited by the BIA. His only previous teaching experience was a year as a teacher's aide.

Upon arrival on Barter Island, he found his first school was a 14-foot by 18-foot building. There were no supplies, no furniture, no records and few textbooks. The entire student body consisted of eight school-age children and four older residents who wanted an education.

Fluent in Inupiat, he taught in both the Native language and English.

In 1953, with assistance from students and parents, Kaveolook started the construction of a new, larger school. Using scrap lumber, much of it salvaged from freight pallets and containers, they built the new school. Completed in 1954, the building served the community until 1964 when a new two-room school was completed.

With the new school came additional teachers. Kaveolook had been the community's only teacher in a one-room school with as many as 46 students.

Fluent in Inupiat, he taught in both the Native language and English. Kaveolook used Inupiat to teach abstract ideas. He also wrote and translated stories in Inupiat for classroom use.

He stressed the "three r's," feeling they were the foundation of anyone's education.

Totally dedicated to the community, Kaveolook led the effort to secure a post office. He felt that having a post office would bring better mail service to the community. It did. It also brought scheduled air service for the

first time. Later, he also helped organize the village council.

When additional teachers came to the community, Kaveolook switched to adult education. He taught people how to fill out their own income tax forms and how to order from catalogs, as well as basic education. Later, he returned to the school as both a teacher and principal.

When Kaktovik built a new school, it was named in Kaveolook's honor.

In 1970, he transferred to Barrow as an elementary school principal. He helped start the community's primary bilingual program in 1974. Later, he served the North Slope Borough School District as the village liaison. In this role, he helped establish advisory school boards and served as a mediator for the communities and the school.

Last June, at age 68, he retired.



Sadie Neakok

photo by Edwin Hall and Associates

Receiving an honorary Doctor of Law degree will be Sadie Neakok, the first Native woman to serve as a magistrate in Alaska.

Born in Barrow in 1916, Neakok was the sixth child of Charles and Ahseagatuk Brower. After completing the eighth grade in Barrow, her father sent her to San Francisco where she earned her high school diploma. Returning to Barrow, she put her high school degree to work. Later, she recruited local students to attend the BIA vocational school at Eklutna.

Accompanying her recruits, she spent a year at Eklutna, working as an assistant dormitory matron and cook.

In the mid-1930s, she entered the University of Alaska, seeking a degree in education. After two years of college, the BIA recruited her to teach in Barrow. She planned to return to the university to complete her degree, but "the chance never came around. There was so much more to do here (in Barrow) than going back to college," she said.

With her teaching, Neakok embarked on a more than 40-year career as a public servant in Barrow. She served the community as a public health nurse and volunteer social worker.

Her role as a magistrate is best known. For 20 years, she was the community's magistrate. She introduced the Alaska court system to the North Slope, explaining the legal system to the Inupiat and adapting it, when necessary, to Inupiat ways. She also used the Native language in the courtroom. Part of the time, she held court at her kitchen table and operated without a law clerk or recorder.

Representatives of Alaska's judicial system uniformly praise her work as a magistrate. In 1985, a plaque honoring her pioneering efforts was

presented at the dedication ceremonies for the new Alaska Court System building in Barrow.

Her role as a magistrate is best known.

Among her many other honors are: Alaska's Mother of the Year in 1968; serving on a White House special committee in 1969; Soroptimist Woman of the Year in 1974; and Alaska Native Woman of the Year twice.

Neakok has been married to Nate Neakok of Barrow for 46 years. The couple has 12 children of their own. They also have raised numerous foster children.



Walter Teeland

UAF photo

Pioneer merchant Walter Teeland will be awarded a Doctor of Public Service. Born in Cleary City, Teeland lived in many of Alaska's gold rush communities during the first part of the century. For the first half of his life he lived throughout the state — Anchorage, Nome, Tanana, Nenana, Ruby, Seward and Coldfoot.

In 1947, he purchased the Knik Trading Co. of Wasilla. Renaming it Teeland's Country Store, Teeland and his wife Vivian have since then made the Mat-Su area their permanent home. They operated the store for 25 years until they sold it in 1972.

An advocate of Alaskan agriculture, education and the community, Teeland helped support all three.

His store carried supplies and materials the area's farmers needed. During lean times, his liberal extensions of credit enabled many to continue farming. Through his store, he bought and sold local agricultural products, providing a market for his farming customers.

An advocate of Alaskan agriculture, education and the community, Teeland helped support all three.

Since 1953, he has been an active member of the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corp. The corporation provided financing of the Matanuska Valley Colonization program and still finances agricultural operations and manages the Federal Land Bank in Alaska.

Later, he became a director of the Matanuska Valley Bank. The bank was renamed the Alaska Bank of Commerce and is now the First Interstate Bank. Teeland still serves as a director.

Teeland was a charter member of the Community College Council for the Mat-Su Community College. He was a member of the council's subcommittee, which selected the site for the college's first permanent facility. He later helped acquire the college's present site. He served on the council from 1969 to 1974.



Florence Weber

UAF photo by Sam Winch

Receiving an honorary Doctor of Science will be Florence Weber. As a professional geologist, Weber has worked throughout the 49th state. Through her publications and her teaching, she is recognized for helping prepare hundreds of geologists for work in Alaska.

Her dedication to the state is widely recognized. Many of her colleagues consider her to be the most knowledgeable geological scientist in the world with respect to the geological history of Interior Alaska.

Since coming to Alaska in 1949, Weber has worked with the U.S. Geological Survey. Her studies are an invaluable foundation for understanding much of the state's geology. Shortly after arriving in the Territory, Weber began an eight-year study of the subsurface of the North Slope in the Naval Petroleum Reserve.

She has written or co-authored almost 50 professional papers.

She conducted engineering geology and road studies for proposed roads from Talkeetna to McGrath and from Fairbanks to Nome. In preparation for the construction of the Trans Alaska Pipeline, she made a geologic study of the then proposed pipeline corridor from Paxson to the Yukon River.

Weber did the geological mapping of the Big Delta and Circle quadrangles as part of the Alaska Mineral Resource Assessment Program. She also mapped the geology of the Livengood and Eagle quadrangles.

Other major studies include the glacial geology of the Yukon-Tanana Upland and the glacial geology of the southern end of the Alaska Peninsula. She has written or co-authored almost 50 professional papers.

For a decade, 1959-1968, Weber taught at the University of Alaska as an adjunct professor while continuing to work for the USGS.

Before coming to Alaska, she had worked for Shell Oil Co. as a subsurface geologist in Houston.

Originally from Milwaukee, Weber earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in geology from the University of Chicago.