

Students join to say thank you to Truitt

by Greg Nothstine
for the Tundra Times

During the week of the 1990 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, Mt. Edgecumbe High School alumni gathered at the Visual Arts Center in downtown Anchorage to honor respected teacher and principle Gil Truitt.

Inupiat Paitot People's Heritage **OPINION**

A Mt. Edgecumbe graduate himself, Truitt went to work for his alma mater 33 years ago and just recently retired. Many students and friends refer to him now as "Mr. Edgecumbe," and those who were mischievous enough in their school days remember having to spend more than a few moments in his stern company. Others, more fortunate and well behaved, received the pleasure of his gentle demeanor and positive attention.

Truitt's dedication to his job in education became his trademark. He wanted every student to get the best learning experience in education the school had to offer.

Throughout the AFN week there were at least 3,000 Alaska Natives who participated directly or indirectly in AFN's process. From all those who were in town more than 300 Mt. Edgecumbe alumni and friends showed up at the Visual Arts Center not only to show their appreciation for Truitt's valued contributions, but to get a chance to meet up with old friends.

When Mt. Edgecumbe High School was first opened in 1947, it was run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and only Alaska Natives and American Indians could attend. Many have gone on to become significant contributors and advocates in Native affairs throughout the state. The school played a significant role in Alaska Native history.

There are about 20,000 Alaska Native graduates of Mt. Edgecumbe's boarding school. All of them share a common ground in the educational experience the school had to offer. There used to be a time when most Alaska Natives either knew of a person going to Mt. Edgecumbe or knew of someone who had graduated from there.

Today, this is not so much the case.

*A Southeast Alaska Tlingit Indian,
Truitt touched the lives of many, leaving
a legacy in educational commitment
to follow. Thank you, Mr. Truitt!
Thank you for all the years you spent
with us students.*

In 1983, the school became a public boarding school run by the state of Alaska. It is now open to the general public. In the transition, the state wanted to keep the school name, but wanted to change the school logo, colors and fight song.

However, it has since kept everything the same. The spirit and uniqueness of the school remain intact, thanks to Truitt, who cared enough to

speak up on behalf of the school.

In this last reunion, Edward J. Shavings Sr. represented the class of 1948 and Nina D. Haynes represented the Class of 1990, while the remaining 300 of us fell somewhere between.

This school has played a significant role in educating generations of rural and urban Alaska Natives. It was apparent this was the case during the week of AFN.

Even Gov. Steve Cowper made an impromptu appearance. He made his way to the center of the crowd at the Visual Arts Center to say a few words about our school and about Truitt. He talked about how Truitt was instrumental in the re-opening of the school.

A Southeast Alaska Tlingit Indian, Truitt touched the lives of many, leaving a legacy in educational commitment to follow. Thank you, Mr. Truitt! Thank you for all the years you spent with us students.

Through thick and thin, you were with us. We hope you continue to remain active in whatever educational endeavors you pursue. May God bless you and keep you until then!

Special thanks to the Mt. Edgecumbe Alumni coordinators — June Degnan and Jeffrey Maupin; Mt. Edgecumbe volunteers Flora Solomon and Eleanor Weedman Case; and contributors Alascom — Junior Ramos; Alaska Native Foundation — Emil Notti; and Visual Arts Center — Juliet Hartwick.