

Fairbanks to host Athabascan fiddlers festival

By Michael States

Over thirty Athabascan fiddlers, backup musicians, dancers and callers will gather in Fairbanks from across the Interior and Canada for an Old Time Fiddler's Festival November 10 and 11 at the Eagles Hall.

The festival is sponsored by the Institute of Alaska Native Arts (IANA), a statewide non-profit organization based in Fairbanks, and will feature workshops for Athabascan dancing, calling and fiddling, as well as jam sessions and a public performance Friday, November 11.

Well-known Athabascan fiddler Bill Stevens is coordinating the project and in this role has traveled extensively through the Interior identifying and recording performers and gathering information on the history and cultural significance of Athabascan fiddle music. Selected artists will receive funds to come to Fairbanks to participate in the festival.

Fiddle music first came to the upper Yukon River villages in the 1860's, brought by Scottish employees of the Hudson Bay Company. Alaskan Natives were attracted to the Scottish jigs and reels, learning the music and dances and

incorporating them into their own traditions and style.

Another more Cajun influence arrived during the gold rush of the 1880's and 1890's, and in modern times country and western has been an influence.

The main aim of the festival is to enrich and preserve this unique Alaskan and Athabascan heritage, as Bill Stevens says: "I think this is going to inspire a lot of young people to take up fiddling."

An informative souvenir program containing the history of Athabascan Old Time Fiddling, biographies of musicians and a schedule of events will be produced by IANA and made available on October 30, 1983.

The festival is to be videotaped in its entirety, including footage from Bill Stevens' village field research, and a 30-minute documentary produced and made available to television stations.

Musicians in Arctic Village, Chalkyitsik, Minto, Shageluk, Stevens Village, Rampart, Ruby, Tanana and Old Crow, Canada have also been identified. In addition to identification, Stevens has gathered information on the history and cultural significance of Athabascan Old Time Fiddling and has taped over one hundred

tunes.

Field research will be completed in early October and Stevens and IANA staff will then select artists to receive

funds to come to Fairbanks for the festival. The program for the event will be developed at that time.

Additional information concerning the Athabascan Old

Time Fiddler's Festival is available by contacting the Institute of Alaska Native Arts at P.O. Box 80583, Fairbanks, Alaska 99708 or by calling the Institute at 907-479-8473.