

Yup'ik value of patience could actually save lives

by John Active and Geoff Kennedy
for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — Nicholai Evon's death was both needless and typical, elders say.

The 54-year-old Kwethluk man tempted fate when he set out last month on a snowmobile trip from Bethel back home.

First, he left around sunset. Travelers at that time cannot tell open water from ice in the dark.

Second, instead of travelling with two companions, he went ahead alone.

Third, the ice was too thin to travel over.

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Searchers the next day found tracks leading to a hole in the ice and one of the victim's gloves. The following day they found the body.

According to one report, searchers found the victim's arm on his shoulder and speculated he was making the Sign of the Cross when he lost his life.

The younger Yup'iks have lost sight of the traditional Yup'ik value of patience and have instead joined the "now generation," elders say.

The trouble, they say, is the search

for instant gratification has increasingly led to recklessness.

In one village, Napaskiak elders have tried to enforce their wisdom. If you venture onto thin ice, the village slaps a \$25 dollar fine on you.

In Kasigluk, the organizers of a city league basketball tournament invited some teams to fly to the tournament, but didn't invite teams a short snowmobile trip away because it was held during a warm snap last month, said Benny Beaver of the Atmauthluak Recreation Committee.

"It's pretty dangerous to travel because of the snow that covers the openings of some of the sloughs," he said, "They're not thick."

An opening in the ice nearly cost an Atmauthluak man his snowmobile and his life, Beaver said.

"We had to pull a snowmachine out from our river, upriver, about a mile, and somebody had fallen in the river while he was out hunting," Beaver said. "But the guy was OK. All he had, I believe, was a sprained collarbone."

The Permanent Fund dividend aggravates the problem. Some people get their checks before the ice is thick enough between the villages and Bethel.

So, a word to the wise, according to elders, please be careful while driving your snowmobiles and don't travel alone.