

State's first honorary diploma awarded to Inupiat Eskimo

By JOHN CREED
For the Tundra Times

A lifelong dedication and leadership contributions to the people of the NANA Region have earned Levi Cleveland, an Inupiat Eskimo, the first honorary diploma ever granted in the State of Alaska.

Cleveland, who is the Advisory School Board president for the Northwest Arctic School District, was awarded an honorary High School Diploma by the district during commencement exercises held recently in Shungnak.

After receiving his diploma, Cleveland advised his people, "Don't wait until you're my age to receive your diploma." And use your education. Our people need your learning to help us develop in this new modern world."

Shungnak School's current enrollment is 47 students, Kindergarten through grade 12.

Also receiving diplomas in this upper Kobuk River community of 200, were Homer Cleveland and Hannah Cleveland. Homer plans to work construction in Shungnak, while Hannah will attend technical school in Fairbanks.

Levi Cleveland's long success has been his ability to adjust to the tremendous changes he has seen in his lifetime. He has had to develop a keen awareness of the modern world and lifestyle, while combining that with the subsistence lifestyle and cultural heritage of his ancestral homeland. His leadership roles are many.

In Shungnak, Cleveland has served on the school board for 12 years, as its president for the last four years. He is president of the Shungnak IRA (Indian Reorganization Act) Council, and is First Sargeant in the local National Guard.

On the regional level, Cleveland is a member of the Arctic



LEVI CLEVELAND

Coastal Zone Management Board, treasurer of the NANA Regional Corp. board of directors, and sits on NANA's land and executive committees.

The 1981 Shungnak graduate is also on NANA's mining committee. Its responsibilities

recently took him to Idaho, Montana, Utah and other Lower 48 states, to meet with mining company officials interested in operations in the NANA Region. He also studied mining operations there, to insure proper development and local control of mining operations in the arctic.

Cleveland has traveled extensively around the region, the state and the nation, fulfilling his many leadership responsibilities.

He speaks both English and Inupiaq fluently.

"Whenever there is a major committee needing leadership," said Shungnak Principal Guy Stringham, "Levi volunteers his expertise."

Regional School Board Chairperson June Nelson regards

Cleveland as the perfect person to receive an honorary diploma for the first time.

"We are proud to honor Levi this way," said Mrs. Nelson. "He is so responsible and dedicated. And he has made working with Shungnak's Advisory Board a pleasure."

Cleveland's commitment to the school in his community has been especially significant in the area of bicultural education. His continuous input has developed perhaps the most effective bilingual/bicultural curriculum in the NANA Region.

"At the same time," said Stringham, "Levi has provided a steady, thoughtful development of a Native economic strategy, because he can meet and work with state and national leaders with ease and ability."