

Traditional crafts provide basis for successful cottage industry

Bob and Maria Charles of Bethel are local artisans who are taking the production of their craft to a new height. They will be meeting with a manufacturing representative in December to discuss production of Maria's Yup'ik dancer dolls. The Charles are working on expanding their craft making operations. They will be engaging in market and product planning to determine what type of product package will best suit their prospective customers' tastes. Their business plan includes the provision of written materials to accompany their dolls and masks. This information and related Yup'ik stories will be educational in their focus, heightening other's awareness of the very special and unique nature of their people.

Bob's parents, Nick and Elena Charles, Sr., are well known for their arts and crafts and, Bob says, are considered as Yup'ik Eskimo tradition bearers. Bob was taught to carve and design the wooden spirit masks that were once used in ceremonies and functions of the Yup'it ... meaning "real people," the name they call themselves. Many of the designs that Bob uses are from Nick's ancestry.

Maria and Bob are somewhat unique as local Native artisans. Taking great effort to write stories and literature to accompany their crafts, they have produced many pages of legends, stories and poems. These, along with descriptions of the masks and dolls, are available to the purchaser. These stories were passed on to Bob Charles and

his siblings, as children. Bob recalls with fondness the many hours spent sitting in the darkness holding a flashlight or candle while the stories were shared. Bob and his sisters felt they were fortunate to have a cousin, Ciukaq, who would draw in the mud, telling stories with her yaaruin - story knife.

Bob, whose given name is Nicholas, Jr., is an economic development specialist for the Association of Village Council Presidents, Inc. (AVCP) in Bethel. As a specialist and a planner, Bob assists with the promotion and development of specific business oriented projects in his region. These pro-

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jects are in the areas of agriculture, energy, federal contracting, fisheries, fur industries, light manufacturing, infrastructure development, minerals, reindeer husbandry and tourism and outdoor recreation.

Because of his work and expertise, Bob is well-suited to teach and consult in the arena of arts and crafts production and marketing. AVCP's goal in promoting economic development includes implementing a program of technical assistance, training, and seeking financial assistance for community development projects. Bob Charles will likely figure prominently in this effort.

Look for him to travel to Bethel area communities offering his services to assist in developing and implementing local community development plans. His assistance to villages in formulating capitalization plans for specific business projects can help fill an important gap in services. ■



Maria and Bob Charles of Bethel combine traditional artwork with their keen business sense.

For further information on the professional economic development services provided by AVCP, call (907) 543-3521.

