

Women stand up for heritage

by Polly Hyslop

for the Tundra Times

Little four year old Travis from Barrow may have felt greatly outnumbered by the female gender when he accompanied his mother to the Alaska Native Women's Statewide Organization 6th Annual Convention held at the Anchorage Westward Hilton earlier this month.

Travis found himself surrounded by 150-200 Native women from all the corporate regions in Alaska.

They attended workshops and panels that centered around the conference's theme, "Cultural Heritage and Transition."

"The goal of the Alaska Native Women's Statewide organization (ANWSO) is unity among Alaska Native women," Brenda Itta, President, told the gathering. She said ANSWO recognized issues

facing Native women.

On a more personal level she said the message she wanted to give as president (of ANSWO) to the members was, "for you to become more involved and alert at local levels. Remember the spirit of giving and sharing what we have with neighbors in a quiet way. One value Alaska Native people have in common is the spirit of giving."

She said ANSWO has three purposes: cultural, educational, and charitable and "this can be accomplished by promoting pride among Alaska Native women."

Keynote speaker, Martha Aiken, a full-blood Eskimo from Barrow, talked about Native heritage and transition. "Our heritage is priceless," she said, "above all, respect yourself and your cultural heritage. Then you can appreciate other cultures and

have no problem with transition."

Martha, mother of 11, has seen change in her lifetime and managed to keep up with it. She dropped out of high school but has completed her junior year in college through correspondence courses.

She is now putting the Inupiat language in writing: "If you respect yourself, you don't have to prove to the world you are somebody," she advised.

The workshops, which covered political, domestic, self-help, and other issues, seemed to have impact on the women.

"The workshops re-educated us. They offered us more than our region would educate us," said Dorothy Edwardson and Marjietta Aiken from Barrow.

Rachael Mumford from North Slope said she was grateful for the workshop, "History of Alaska

Native Claims Settlement Act," and wished she had more time because there is so much to know on that subject.

Alice Solomon from Barrow said she attended the, "Effective Family Communication" workshop because she feels there is a generation gap in the Inupiat language. She was concerned because the old people can't speak Inupiat to their children and

grand-children.

"Everybody talks about it, but we're not doing too much to make a go of it," she concluded.

Juanita Corvin, Member At-Large, said the most important issue was 1991. "It affects us all," she said, "and we need to know the options. The shareholders point of view is important."

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Women learn about 1991

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"I'm an educated person and I don't know anything about 1991," confessed a teacher from a village. If there were questions the "1991 Issues" workshop provided answers to confusion. Also, a panel headed by Perry Eaton, Willy Hensley and Roy Hundorf addressed Alaska Native Claims Act and 1991.

"I have a tendency to sit around and expect the corporation to do everything; I need to get involved," admitted Louise Booth from Barrow. She said she didn't

know much about 1991 before she came to the conference but since has been educated.

Priscilla Sage from Barrow said she has attended every conference since it first began. She said the idea for the Barrow Women and Children Crisis Center originated at such a meeting.

The women who attended the conference represented varied facets of the village, town, or city they come from. Their diverse backgrounds didn't lessen their enthusiasm.

The ANSWO has 12 chapters throughout Alaska. One of the goals for the organization is to organize more.