

Fairbanks prisoners hold potlatch

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FAIRBANKS — A performance by the Chevak Tanqik Theater was one of the highlights of the sixth annual Native Culture Awareness Class Potlatch held last month at the Fairbanks Correctional Center.

The event lasted about six hours and was attended by more than 100 guests and 70 prisoners.

As in the past, the potlatch was a memorial and a giving of thanks to the Great Spirit for the many blessings we have received. The memorial was symbolized by the candle-lighting ceremony.

Thomas Henry, Athabaskan from Galena and an NCAC member, spoke

on why we are thankful even while imprisoned. Darla Rose Alexander, Athabaskan from Fort Yukon and also an NCAC member, presented a thanksgiving prayer:

"We thank the Great Spirit for all we have — for friends and family; health, humor and humility; for the children, through whom we see the love; for the stars, the sun and the moon; the moose, whale and caribou; the snow, rain and wind. . ."

Traditional food was served and made available by the prisoner's relatives across the state and included *akikkak* (whale flipper, similar to *maktak*), caribou, seal, fish, *akutuq* (Eskimo ice cream), moose, deer, beaver, goose and fry bread.

The NCAC members and volunteers

worked very hard for two days prior to the potlatch preparing the food.

Janie Leask, Tsimshian and president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, was the keynote speaker. She spoke on the AFN Report on the Status of Alaska Natives: A Call for Action. The report deals with health and social issues in rural Alaska and calls on Native leaders and government officials to act.

The Crossing Paths drummers and dancers, who are keeping the Lakota ways alive in Alaska, involved the audience after the speeches in the round dance and showed people their spiritual side. The NCAC Inupiat Dancers gave their version of the Walrus Dance to the beat of several drums near the end of the gathering.