

# Mildred Sparks, dedicated mother 'with a PhD in Tlingit'

Four decades ago "when it became fashionable for Tlingits to turn to western ways one woman stood her ground and vocally opposed the organized thought that it was time for the Tlingit people to give up their language and their cultures.

She "went through a painful time in her battle" but her beliefs prevailed and the Tlingit people of Southeast Alaska still speak their language and live in their culture.

That woman, Mildred Sparks, was honored for that effort and many other contributions to her people, by the Alaska Statewide Native Women's Organization recently.

Mildred Sparks taught her people many things - "to love our people and show that love in many kind and giving ways; to strive to excellence and to show respect to all

people and to anyone who deserves respect; to work for our people," said Emma Widmark who spoke the words in introducing Mrs. Sparks award.

"She expects us to be strong. She asks very little and gives much. She counsels, nurtures and loves each of us," said Widmark.

Describing the contributions that Mrs. Sparks has made to the Tlingit people, she said simply, "Mildred Sparks has a PhD in Tlingit.

"An elder in her church, a member of the historical society, the Republican Party, and the museum board, Mrs. Sparks has tried to educate non-Native people to the Tlingit way of life, said Widmark.

Mrs. Sparks had six children of her own and adopted many others. She was named national Mother of the Year, was former Grand Camp President of

the Alaska Native Sisterhood and is now Grand Camp Emeritus of the NAS. She has an honorary doctorate from the University of Alaska.

Mrs. Sparks was not able to attend the banquet which honored her because she suffered a stroke three months ago but because of her determination she was able to overcome the

partial paralysis that she suffered and on the day of the banquet she walked out of the hospital. She returned home to store up fish for the winter and to make sure her daughter and grandchildren picked enough berries, said Irene Rowan, one of her daughters.

Mrs. Rowan said that when her mother learned of "this soared. She was so complimented and pleased that an organization made up of Alaska Native women would think of her and would give her such an honor."