



The late Jenny Thlunaut, master Chilkat weaver.

*Photo courtesy of Anchorage Museum of History and Art*

## Aid for Native languages

Saying that there is no time to lose, Alaska Sen. Frank Murkowski has secured support for funding to implement the Native American Language Act.

Murkowski in 1991 was the original sponsor of the act to provide federal grants to help preserve and teach Native languages to new speakers before the languages are lost from disuse. The bill will fund Native culture centers, programs to research, codify and teach Native languages and support public communication efforts.

"Alaska's indigenous languages face a critical time. Out of the 20 original Native languages spoken in Alaska, only two, Sibe-

rian Yupik and Central Yupik, continue to be spoken by children. The other 18 Alaska Native languages face extinction early in the next century. The Native American Languages Act can help to enhance and preserve many of these languages. But time is running out.

"It is vital that the bill go into effect soon. We can't wait another year," said Murkowski, who noted that just this past year one of the two living elders who speak Iiyak, the Native language in the Copper River Valley, died — cutting the chances in half for successful preservation efforts for one of Alaska's 18 languages.

## Native artisans honored

*America's Living Folk Traditions*, an exhibition featuring the work of recipients of the nation's highest award for folk arts, opened at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art October 3 and continues on view through November 28, 1993.

The exhibition, which appears in Anchorage in celebration of 1993 being the year of American Craft, honors the achievements of National Heritage fellows recognized by the Folk Art Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, including Alaska Native artists Paul Tiulana, King Island Inupiaq Eskimo maskmaker/dancer/singer, 1984; the late Jenny Thlunaut, Tlingit Chilkat Blanket Weaver, 1986;

Ester Littlefield, Tlingit beadworker/basketmaker of Sitka, 1991; Belle Deacon, Athabaskan birch bark and willow root basketmaker from Grayling, 1992; and Yup'ik carver Nick Charles of Bethel, who was honored as a 1993 award recipient.

The National Heritage Fellowships, first awarded in 1982, were conceived to pay tribute to exemplary practitioners of traditional folk arts. They are given annually to several of the nation's most distinguished traditional artists, who practice within a wide variety of visual and performing art traditions. While each honoree is a master craftsperson, the award is meant to honor not only the quality of an artist's work, but his

or her dedication to practicing, continuing, and furthering a particular artistic tradition.

Nominated by their peers, eligible artists must be actively participating in their art form and demonstrate authenticity, excellence, and worthiness of national recognition. The awards take the form of one-time-only grants of \$5,000 each, presented during annual ceremonies in Washington, D.C.

*America's Living Folk Traditions* is funded by the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal Agency; the Museum of New Mexico Foundation; and the International Folk Foundation.