



Artists creating bentwood art last year are, from left, Glenda Lindley of Juneau, Fred Anderson of Naknek and Kathleen Carlo, James Grant and Lisa Rogers, all of Fairbanks. The artists gathered for a symposium last year, and the works are now on display in Fairbanks in an exhibition called "Bending Tradition." More photos, pages ten and eleven.

## Fairbanks, Yakutsk host exchange

by Holly F. Reimer  
Tundra Times reporter

The Fairbanks North Star Borough's Sister Cities Exchange program recently concluded an exchange with its sister city in the Soviet Union, and officials say it was the biggest exchange ever.

On Aug. 13 a group of 37 people from the Fairbanks area traveled to Yakutsk, Fairbanks' sister city in the

Soviet Far East.

At the same time, Fairbanks hosted 47 people from the Yakutsk Region, and they returned to the Soviet Union Aug. 21.

"The exchanges are people to people," said Rose Cade, liaison between the sister city program and the borough.

She said the borough sister cities program is an international exchange

with "sisters" in Japan, Taiwan and one with a city in Germany that's still being discussed.

While the Yakutsk delegation was in Fairbanks a memorandum of understanding was signed between the state of Alaska and the Supreme Soviet Yakutian Republic. The memorandum consists of cultural, economic and

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medical cooperation between the two regions. This became effective Aug. 20.

Bernice M. Joseph, a 26-year-old Athabascan Koyukon Indian born in Nulato who traveled to Yakutsk, said the people she met seemed like old friends.

"The night on the beach with the bonfire going, the games we played, the songs we sang and the communication — be it by a translator, by sign language or by a combination of everything — was just overwhelming," Joseph wrote in an article submitted to the *Tundra Times*.

"The people were so warm, so curious as to the type of life we lived and so attentive to our needs. There seemed to be a special bonding that evening," she continued.

Joseph got special recognition while in the Soviet Union. She won Miss Lena River in a beauty contest. Actually the first "International Miss Lena River."

The group went on a four-day cruise on the Lena River. Joseph said they visited a cultural camp, which was partially under construction and an outdoor museum. They saw huge rock formations, and they also did a little hiking.

She said the Yakutian people have great respect for the river. It's part of their culture and legends.

"This large river has so much meaning to the Yakutian people. They did not speak of it loudly, but referred to it as, 'our sister,' or 'our brother,'" she explained.

***'As I de-planed, I was shocked to hear someone calling my name. Here to greet me was a stranger shoving a bouquet of flowers into my arms and taking charge of carry-on luggage.'***

***—Miranda Wright***

Although a large percentage of the Soviets who came to Fairbanks were Native, only a handful of the Alaskans who traveled over there were Native.

Fairbanks Native Association was asked by the sister city program to help get Native participation on the trip.

Sam Demientieff, executive director of FNA, said he sent a memorandum to the board of directors and to FNA employees, but only three Natives from the Fairbanks area went and one Native from Southeast.

The trip cost a total of \$1,500 for each traveler, which Demientieff said was actually reasonable considering the stay was eight nights and nine days. That price included everything.

He said the lack of Native presence

could have been because the program didn't advertise extensively enough, and the word just didn't get around in time.

Demientieff said one of the reasons why travel organizers wanted more Alaska Natives to go was because about 80 percent of the population in Yakutsk is Native.

Another Alaska Native traveler to Yakutsk was Athabascan Indian Miranda Wright, who was born in the Nulato area. She was one of the visitors who had a host house in which to stay.

Alaskan delegates boarded a bus for the hotel, I was pulled and urged to accompany this stranger and her young male companion into a waiting car," Wright explained.

She said the thought of the Cold War and Siberian salt mines raced through her head, and she wasn't sure why she should go with the two individuals.

"I could not comprehend leaving the secretary of our group in the middle of the night with two complete strangers.

"As our luggage was unloaded, I located our interpreter who explained that I was selected for a homestay with Svetlana 'Svelte' Popova, the stranger who was calling my name.

"With this bit of information, I bravely accompanied my hostess and her driver into the waiting car," she explained.

After the tension settled and they arrived at Svetlana's home, Wright took a shower while Svetlana prepared a full course meal. Wright was surprised that a total stranger would go so far out of her way to comfort her at such an inconvenient time of day.

Wright said people were matched to stay with a host by age, occupation, or common interests.

"We are both so excited that our conversations are going non-stop, by 5 a.m. we both decide that we must get some sleep if we are to meet the delegation by 10 a.m."

Wright explained even though the plane landed at 3 a.m., the group which welcomed the Alaskans was overwhelming.

"As we de-planed, each Alaskan delegate was presented with a fresh bouquet of flowers. In addition to the mayor of Yakutsk, there was a delegation of local Natives in their ceremonial attire carrying their traditional welcoming loaf of bread along with several interpreters," she wrote in an article about her experiences.

"As I de-planed, I was shocked to hear someone calling my name. Here to greet me was a stranger shoving a bouquet of flowers into my arms and taking charge of carry-on luggage. As