

# Performers convey ancient Cup'ik culture

by Maria Williams  
for the Tundra Times

The Chevak Tanqik Theater performed for one week at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, as part of the Alaska Native Performance Series organized by the Cook Inlet Region Inc. Foundation and the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Elders David Boy Scout, 69, and Joseph Ayagarak, 74, led the group during its Anchorage performances.

The rest of the group — James

The group recently performed in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Nome, Bethel, Juneau, the Alaska State Fair in Palmer and in other Alaskan cities and villages. They also traveled to Vancouver, B.C., to perform for the Expo '86 and Brisbane, Australia, for Expo '88 and have toured the Soviet Union, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Hawaii.

Even though they have performed extensively throughout the United States and Alaska, the Chevak group

lasts 13 weeks during the summer months.

The program has several goals: to educate people and expose them to the traditional art, music and dance of Alaska Natives and to involve more Native people in the lucrative tourist industry.

The Alaska Native Performance Series gives tourists and audience members the opportunity to truly learn about Alaska Native cultures while recognizing and honoring the traditional culture bearers.

Other participants in the 1990 summer series include the King Island

Dancers, the Athabascan Fiddlers from Fairbanks, the Taheta Pt. Hope Dancers, the Tlingit and Haida Dancers of Anchorage, the Greatland Traditional Dancers, the Nunamta Yup'ik Dancers, the Northern Lights Dancers and the Minto Dancers and Singers.

Each summer about 1,100 people attend their performances at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

The series is organized by CIRI Foundation with funding from the Alaska State Legislature, NANA, CIRI, Anchorage Magazine, Alaska Airlines and MarkAir.

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Tuluk, Phyllis Boy Scout, Maxine Ayagarak, Anthony Boy Scout, Alfred Ulroan, Ruth Matchian, Daniel Ayagarak and Jennifer Teve — are all students of the Chevak school district and community members.

The Chevak group was formed in 1984 through the Kashunamit School District's Cultural Heritage Center. John Pingayak, director, integrates Cup'ik cultural studies in the school district's curriculum, employing elders as instructors so the students learn their traditional cultural arts, practices and survival skills along with the regular school curriculum.

The formation of the Chevak Tanqik Theater in 1984 marked the beginnings of an active cultural theater company.

still has its traditional values in focus. They preserve and convey the ancient cultural knowledge of the Cup'ik people and encourage continued support of traditional values and practices.

The group's elders teach and pass on Cup'ik stories, songs and dances to the students, and in this way maintain a balance between the traditional and modern worlds.

The Chevak Tanqik Theater was recently featured as part of the 1990 Alaska Native Performance Series which presents different performing artists representing various Alaskan Native culture groups. Each group performs for one week, and the series