

# Films highlight Native elders

From *The Elders*, a series of three short films presenting the words of Alaska Native elders, will premiere in Anchorage Oct. 28 at 7:30 p.m. at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

In Fairbanks the series will premiere Nov. 2 in the University of Alaska Fairbanks Schauble Auditorium at 8 p.m. and Nov. 4 at the Noel Wien Public Library at 7 p.m.

The series was produced and directed by Katrina Kassler Waters of the Alaska Native Heritage Film Project, University of Alaska, with major funding from the Alaska Humanities Forum and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Waters will be present to introduce the films. A reception will follow the showing.

Each film in the series presents a respected Native elder speaking in a different traditional narrative form. The elders speak in their Native languages; English translations are subtitled or voiced-over. Together, the films provide a window into Eskimo thought and expression not commonly heard or seen first-hand by outsiders.

They reveal ways in which knowledge and advice have traditionally been passed down in these cultures through generations, from the times when there were no written languages up through the present.

Samuel Irrigoo of Gambell recounts historical events in Gambell from the year the first missionary arrived in the film *In Irrgu's Time*. Speaking in Siberian Yupik, Irrigoo describes among other things how this missionary converted the people, what trouble the visiting Siberians caused for the white people and how everyone laughed so hard when they saw the first pig on the island that no one could catch.

In *The Reindeer Thief*, Lincoln Blassi, also from Gambell, tells a mythical story about the man who goes out in search of an alleged reindeer thief. The encounter that ensues becomes a test of supernatural powers and deceit.

Joe Sun, who lives in the Inupiaq village of Shungnak on the Kobuk River, talks in part about the prophecies of his great uncle, Manillaq, and about what he himself has seen in the third film in the series, *Joe Sun*.

Sun remembers, "Manillaq predicted that some day in the future, people would come with a different language and live among them, and everything would change. When a woman had babies, she would even start traveling through the air."

Historical photographs (some taken by the earliest photographers to visit the elders' regions) and village scenes are interwoven with footage of the elders talking to provide an evocative visual context for the stories.

Katrina Waters has been associated with the Alaska Native Heritage Film Project for the past five years. The project is co-directed by Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling, who also served as executive producers of the series.

A guide written by Waters to accompany the series provides background information about the communities of Gambell and Shungnak, the elders, their narratives and the context in which each spoke.

The guide also describes the "community-determined" methods employed in filming and editing.