

first ever Elder of the Year for AFN

by Tina Riley

special to the *Tundra Times*

Question: What do you want to do when you are 92 years-old? Answer: Dance. Or at least that is what Mattie Bodfish would say.

Mattie Bodfish, at 92, is the oldest member of the Wainwright Dancers. She was announced as the first ever recipient of the Elder of the Year Award at the Alaska Federation of Natives convention on Saturday.

Last year the Alaska Federation of Natives decided to give the award. There were 15 nominees this year. Julie Kitka, president of AFN, announced Bodfish as the winner because "she personifies the very qualities of individual character which AFN honors and seeks to foster in the younger Alaska Native generations."

To the younger generations, Bodfish is known as Grandma. To others, she is called Aanavak, her Inupiaq name. She has raised 13 children, numerous grand and great-grandchildren, and is beginning to help with four great-great-grandchildren.

At the AFN convention, Bodfish could be found with her best friend, Nannie Kagak, 84. Nannie, also an Inupiaq, said that Bodfish is very caring and is always helping other people. Mattie's family

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claims that she also knows everything about the old ways.

And family she has with over 70 grandchildren, nearly 125 great-grandchildren and four great-great grandchildren.

As for Mattie, she prefers to talk about her dancing. She refers to her dancing as a language all her own. She says that her dancing is a way of telling others the stories and traditions of the Inupiaq peoples. "The most important thing to me is danc-

ing. I like to dance and I'll never stop dancing."