

Miss WEIO plans to become teacher

by Barbara Crane
Tundra Times reporter

FAIRBANKS — Karen Hope Cooke, a Yupik Eskimo from Bethel, has been crowned Miss World Eskimo-Indian Olympics.

Cooke received the ivory and baleen crown from the former Miss WEIO, Cherissa Welm of Kotzebue.

Then, with tears flowing, she waved to the crowd and accepted their congratulations.

"I want to thank my parents and my family for supporting me," Cooke said, "and the people of Bethel for sponsoring me."

Contestants for the title of Miss WEIO must be a lot more than pretty faces.

They are judged on their knowledge of traditional Native culture and values, personality, self-confidence, attitude and intelligence.

A personal interview and impromptu questioning are part of the competition.

"They asked me questions about my culture and about other people's cultures," Cooke said. "They also asked me about the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, so I needed to know about its history.

"We had to describe the traditional clothes we were wearing, too."

Cooke's mother sewed five kuspiks for her to wear during the competition,

and the squirrel parka she wore won third place in the Eskimo Skin Parka contest.

Cooke, 18, is fluent in the Yupik language. She performed an Eskimo dance and sang and translated a song in Yupik for her presentation in the talent part of the competition.

The panel of judges voted her Most Talented among the contestants.

A graduate of Bethel Regional High School, Cooke plans to attend Smith College in Massachusetts, majoring in education and child studies.

"I'm looking forward to the honor of being Miss WEIO," she said. "After college, I'm going to return to Bethel and become an elementary teacher, so working with kids is very important to me.

"Giving the kids someone to look up to will be one of the best parts of being Miss WEIO."

Cooke will also represent Alaska



Miss WEIO was also "most talented."

Natives at the upcoming National Congress of American Indians in Oklahoma.

First runnerup for the Miss WEIO title was Marie Grant of Tanana. Grant, 20, works for the Tanana IRA Native Council. She plans to attend college to study business administration, and then she would like to return to Tanana and work for her village corporation.

Angela Jackson of Gakona was second runnerup. She was also voted Miss Congeniality by the other contestants. Jackson, 18, graduated from Glennallen High School this spring and will be a freshman at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the fall.

Other contestants were Patricia Ballard of Huslia (voted Miss Photogenic), Tasha Marie Edwards of Barrow, Kathryn John of Mentasta Lake and Diane Schaeffer of Kotzebue.