

# Spring means celebration on St. Lawrence Walrus Carnival

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

Walrus and whale hunting season is a good indication that it's springtime on St. Lawrence Island — and that means it's time for celebration.

Since 1965 villagers at Savoonga have held an annual Walrus Carnival. It's just after the bowhead whales have migrated past the island and when hunters can start preparing for walrus hunts.

This year, the carnival is scheduled for June 22 to 24.

And this year there is much cause for celebration. Both villages met their bowhead whale quotas of four whales each and springtime came a little early compared to last year when Gambell struck out and ended up with no whale meat for the year and Savoonga only got one whale.

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"It has been an extraordinary year. We have been blessed," James Waghiyi, chairperson and organizer of the carnival said during a recent telephone interview.

But, he said, the blessing was actually a case of circumstance — good weather conditions.

Waghiyi said this year the carnival is going to be a little different. Villagers aren't only celebrating the walrus harvest season but also re-opening of the border between Alaska and the Soviet Union.

He said before the ice curtain was drawn shut over 48 years ago, Eskimo people from both sides would frequently visit each other.

Both the Soviet and Alaska groups of Eskimos speak the same language, and many are related.

"New Chaplino is the second settlement of a group of blood ties. We consider their people and the old village of Chaplino as our other mother village," he said.

He said the New Chaplino people came from Savoonga. Savoonga had been started earlier by people from Gambell around 1900.

Waghiyi said before the cold war people would gather together on either side of the border and have dances and

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***—James Waghiya***

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celebrations. He said many of the dances are still performed by both groups.

Nine dancers from New Chaplino will be attending the celebrations along with dance groups from Gambell and Savoonga.

Waghiyi said the Siberian Eskimos have similar celebrations called holy days. He said the Siberians have invited several Savoonga residents to join in the Soviets' whale celebration on July 21.

To commemorate this year's carnival a T-shirt featuring the Soviet, Alaska and American flags on it along with walrus and people will be available.