

# Potlatch honors Kodiak graduates

by Mike Rostad  
for the Tundra Times

KODIAK — Graduates of Kodiak Island schools were honored in a potlatch and pow wow recently, sponsored by the Indian Education Parent Committee of the Kodiak Island Borough School District.

This is the first time for such an event. Songs, dances and words of encouragement were presented as gifts to the graduates. They are taking "one more step into the unknown," according to Pete Olsen, Kodiak elder who gave the invocation.

Featured at the pow wow were the Shoonag Tribal Dancers of Kodiak and the Morning Star and Northern Lights Inter-Tribal Pow Wow Clubs of Anchorage. The Shoonag Dancers introduced new dancers, Christine Ignatin, Linda Lester, Trisha Cox and John Dernentieff. The group has danced in 31 performances since it was formed nine months ago.

After the potlatch, people entered the auditorium of the Kodiak Island High School to the sounds of chanting and drum beats.

Drummers sat in a circle in the center of the gym and chanted as dancers representing Native tribes in Alaska, the Lower 48 and Central America, came into the auditorium. Leading the dancers were carriers of the American and Alaska flags.

Sam Lamabull, of the Northern



Lights, took issue with the notion that Natives are losing their culture.

"I don't believe Natives can lose something so precious. We believe our ways are coming back all over the United States," he said. "People are seeing how precious our dances and songs are."

Lamabull said he was happy to see the dancers from Kodiak and stressed the importance of community support. When young people sing the songs, dance the dances and work on the costumes, they're less likely to get involved with alcohol and drug abuse, he said.



Donna Converse, above left, and Judy Simeonoff greet each other in the welcome dance. Dancers are, at far left, Jackie Brown, and, at left, Chris Converse. This is the first time graduates of Kodiak Island schools were honored in a potlatch and pow wow.

photos by Mike Rostad