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UAF graduate never lived in dorms, set foot in class

by Emma A. Ahvakana
for the Tundra Times

Among several hundred degrees handed out through the University of Alaska Fairbanks last month, one belonged to 44-year-old mother of three and grandmother of five, Elizabeth A. Ahvakana of Nuiqsut. She earned a bachelor of arts degree in elementary education.

Ahvakana was born at Smith Bay in the Barrow area and raised on the North Slope of Alaska. She has lived all her life in the villages of Barrow, Kaktovik and Nuiqsut.

She is married to the Rev. Nelson N. Ahvakana, and together they have three grown children.

Ahvakana started teaching in Barrow as an early childhood education teacher from 1976 to 1979. She taught in Kaktovik from 1979 to 1982, and her most recent teaching position is at

Trapper School in Nuiqsut.

During the years since 1976, she has taken courses through the university's College of Human and Rural Development, Cross-Cultural Education Development, Rural Education, North Slope Higher Education Center and a few from Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka.

She has never set foot in a college classroom nor lived in college dorms. She has taken a majority of her courses through home course study. She has lived her goal by teaching in a rural Alaska community for 14 years. And for 15 years, she has labored with college homework while cooking, cleaning and raising three children.

Ahvakana has plans to enroll through home courses this fall and work toward her master's degree. She says she won't stop until she gets her doctorate.