

# SJC commended for educating Alaska Natives

The Alaska Native Education Council commended Sheldon Jackson College for its contribution to and efforts in improving higher education for Alaska Native students. Luanne Pelagio president of ANEC and coordinator of many of the Anchorage School District programs for Alaska Native students, presented the award to Dr. Mary Lou Madden during the ANEC Conference held in Anchorage October 16 and 17 in conjunction with the AFN Convention Youth and Elders Conference. ANEC also presented a posthumous award to Margaret Panigeo Gray, graduate of Sheldon Jackson High School, Class of

1935, for lifelong contributions to education's.

"Sheldon Jackson has been a name that for over 100 years has meant quality education for Alaska Natives," said Luanne Pelagio, "I am pleased to make this award to recognize the strides that Sheldon Jackson College is making for future generations of Alaska Native college students. These strides will help all people throughout the state as Alaska Natives seek to acquire their college degrees."

Last February, the Alaska Native Education Council and Sheldon Jackson College co-sponsored the Higher Education Forum, inviting

educators, students and elders from around the state to address the hurdles that Alaska Natives face in earning a college degree. The need to feel a sense of belonging; the need to have a supportive, caring environment in which to learn, the need for family-style relationships at school were among the most important aspects for success, according to students and college graduates who participated in the Forum. Recommendations from the Forum stressed the importance of building these support systems into the campus environment.

"It is expensive to provide a 10:1 ratio between students and faculty and to promote round the clock support to students needing someone to talk to," said Madden after the banquet. "But to our way of thinking, that expense is worth it because that support helps get the motivated Alaska Native student all the way through his or her degree program.

We will not sacrifice that personalized instruction despite the cost. Ultimately, it pays off."

Accepting the Lifetime Achievement Award for her mother, who passed away in August at the Barrow hospital, was Nancy Gray-Keller, special assistant to the CEO of Arctic Slope Regional Corp., received her mother's award with tears in her eyes.

"Mom was so close to so many people over the years," said Keller, "only recently have I realized how many of these people were her students, who continued to stay in touch with her and ask her advise on their work." Keller said her mother often spoke of the education and nurture she had received while a student at Sheldon Jackson.

"She was very honored to have been a part of the Higher Ed. Forum last winter. She talked to us a lot about the joy she felt returning to campus after so many years and being asked to offer her suggestions and encouragement for college

bound students."

Margaret Panigeo Gray taught school in rural Alaskan villages from St. Lawrence Island to Annette Island as well as Hawaii and Montana. She received her BA and teaching credentials from Central Washington at Ellensburg. After retiring from the teaching profession, she worked for the state of Alaska in Juneau. After her husband died, in 1983, she returned to Barrow, her hometown, and was active in the Senior Citizens Center there.

The Alaska Native Education Council was organized nearly 10 years ago for the purpose of advocating and increasing educational opportunities for Alaska Native and Native American students throughout the state. ANEC is the education committee for the Alaska Federation of Natives. Each year the recommendations that ANEC submits to AFN set the action agenda for educational improvements.