

Chugach Heritage features Eyak language film

Chugach Heritage Foundation will present the film, *More Than Words... The Life and Language of the Last Eyak Speaker*, to coincide with this year's Alaska Federation of Natives Conference in Anchorage.

The film follows 77-year old Marie Smith Jones on an emotional journey back to her childhood home of Cordova. As the last Native speaker of her language, Chief Jones presided over a Potlatch - the first for the Eyaks in more than 80 years. The film captures the dramatic transformation that took place over those seven days in June, 1994.

More Than Words... tells a very powerful story about language and its vital relationship to culture. In Alaska alone, eighteen of the twenty Native languages still being spoken are now in danger of dying within our children's and grandchildren's lifetimes, according to some experts.

"The lesson of Eyak in history is that everything is relative. This is a situation we face virtually all over the world. Everywhere the larger people are trying to obliterate the smaller. And mankind's diversity and all the different views of the world - all the different kinds of wisdom they have gathered - is being lost to the expansion of the few," said linguist Dr. Michael Krauss.

It is the hope of the producers and the participants that this film will help create a greater sense of urgency once people truly understand what this loss will mean - how language is more than words.

The film takes abstract issues that affect everyone and makes them more accessible by putting a human face on them. It does not preach, sentimentalize or over simplify the issues. It is Marie and those who are important in her life who eloquently provide the answer to the larger question of why people should care about Native language.

The premiere of the film is a benefit for the Eyak Language Recovery Project. The documentary is just the first step toward preserving a vital record of this language. In the next phase, the footage from this project will be integrated into a

multimedia CD-ROM computer program to help others learn basic Eyak words. This new technology will be used to compliment time-tested teaching methods. In fact, this November 4th and 5th, a language recovery workshop will be held in Cordova - the first ever for the Eyak people.

Regional along with private companies, are being asked to sponsor seats for elders for the premiere. Native dance groups from several regions will perform and make special presentations after the film is screened. After the premiere, the film will be screened nightly at Cyrano's Bookstore for the duration of the AFN conference.

Here are the dates and times for all showings:

Premiere Benefit: Tuesday, October 17 at 8pm at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts.

Donation levels are \$35 and \$50 a seat. Tickets are available through all CARRS TIX outlets or by calling 263-ARTS. Outside Anchorage, call toll-free 800-478-7328.

Nightly screenings: Wednesday, October 18 through Saturday, October 21 at 6 pm at Cyrano's Bookstore, 413 D Street in Anchorage.

Nightly screenings are being sponsored on a pay-what-you can basis.

For additional information about the film, contact: Laura Bliss Spaan, at 272-3878

Major sponsors of the film include: Alaska Humanities Forum, Chugach Heritage Foundation, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, Chugach Alaska Corporation, CIRI Foundation, Fund of the Four Directions, Bliss Productions, Weston Productions, Connections and The Videoplex.