



Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer congratulates graduates Virgil Aliralria and Christine Carl of Kipnuk.

May 10 marks the start of new lives in Kipnuk

by Barbara Crane
Tundra Times reporter

KIPNUK — May 10 marked the start of new lives for 18 young people from this village on the Kugulik River in Southwestern Alaska.

As their families, friends and teachers watched, nine seniors from Kipnuk High School celebrated their graduation and nine eighth graders moved up from the elementary school to take their places.

The students had decorated the room with festive purple and white streamers and balloons and a banner on one wall proclaimed the class motto, "To believe is the first step in achieving our dreams."

Flashbulbs popped as the students entered the room one by one to the "Pomp and Circumstance" march

played by Kelly Fredson and Joshua Paul. The students were excited but very nervous as they realized what a big step they were taking.

The ceremony began with a Yupik invocation by James Anaver and a welcome by principal John Kaufman.

Sophie Carl, the graduate with the highest grade average, spoke on behalf of the Class of '89. She thanked her parents and teachers for helping her.

"Without their help," Carl said, "I probably wouldn't have come back for another year."

She said that when she looks at the first graders, it is hard for her to imagine that she was like them such a short time ago.

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• Nine graduate at Kipnuk

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Traditionally, the seniors vote among themselves to decide who to invite to speak at their graduation. This year, their first choice was Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer, adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard.

He was selected because he is a Native leader and because he supports Kipnuk's efforts to keep their village dry.

Schaeffer said that while he had dropped out of high school in his junior year, he had attended the graduation ceremonies for his eight children and he knew the emotions they must be feeling. He encouraged them to get all the education they could so they could become leaders of their people, and he urged them not to let alcohol ruin their lives.

Command Sgt. Maj. Dennis Metrokin also addressed the students and amused them with stories about his own early education, first by correspondence and then at small schools in Naknek and on Kodiak Island. He talked about the importance of having goals, setting priorities and believing in one's self.

In addition to valedictorian Sophie Carl, graduating seniors included Virgil Aliralria, Peggy Amik, Christine Carl, Dora Dock, Oscar Gunlik, Oscar Mesak, Carol Paul and Cheryl Paul.

Eighth graders moving up to high school were Bradford Aliralria, Carrie Amik, Carl Karl, Christopher Dock, John Hinz, Chris Kashatok, James McMillan, Daron Paul and Angela Peter.