

How to Start a Village Museum

One of the most novel how-to booklets to come along in some time is the University of Alaska Museum guide for establishing a small museum in an Alaskan Native community.

Written by Kate Duncan, with drawings by Janis Senungetak, the local museum guide calls on Alaska Natives to develop living museums that will allow them to preserve and share the past and raise the prestige of Native cultures, especially among their own people.

"Among Alaskan Native young people, the general lack of knowledge about even the most recent past is dismaying," writes Duncan in justification of local museums. "Many children watching their grandfathers carve cannot identify what is being made. Often when talking with Native high school students, one finds a sense of their own history distressingly lacking.

"There is a genuine surprise and then pleasure at discovering that the art of their people is

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considered something very fine and very special by others all over the world. Natives and non-Natives both are becoming aware of and concerned about this vacuum," she writes.

What the booklet proposes is that the community itself can be the best teacher in educating its young people about its past. A small museum would provide visual material and room for storytellers, craftsmen and women and other allied activities.

The booklet then goes on to explain simply, but in specific detail the function and responsibilities of museums, how to obtain land and governmental consulting services, how to obtain funding for a museum (there are many sources) and how to operate the finished museum.

The possibilities of activities for museums in Native villages are endless. The booklet suggests activities ranging from an art shop to sell crafts within the building to facilities for recording music, legends and dance, to programs in conjunction with the local school.

Copies of "Guide for Establishing a Small Museum in an Alaskan Native Community" are available from the University of Alaska Museum, College, Alaska, 99701.

It is available without charge for organizations.