

AFN keynote speech

Hopson: Celebrate culture by living it

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The greatest celebration Alaska Natives can make of Native culture and lifestyle is to live it and be proud, Eddie Hopson, Inupiat elder from Barrow, told delegates to the 1990 Alaska Federation of Natives Annual Convention.

Hopson, who has lived all his life on the North Slope and has served as a director and president of the Arctic Slope Regional Corp., delivered the keynote address to the convention Thursday in Anchorage.

He was referring to AFN's theme this year, "Celebrating Alaska Native Cultures and Lifestyles." AFN Presi-

dent Julie Kitka said earlier the theme was selected to reflect the diversity and uniqueness of Alaska Native peoples and cultures.

Hopson began his remarks by saying that he was not at the convention to "lecture" the delegates, but to speak from his heart, talking about what his culture means to him.

He said that because he grew up in Barrow and had a non-Native grandfather who spoke mainly English and Inupiat grandmother who spoke mainly Inupiat, he learned about the importance of language to a culture and also to respect people of different cultures.

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Those who celebrate culture and values should leave no room in their hearts for racial prejudice, he said.

Hopson said culture is not something to be viewed as a relic in a museum, but celebrated constantly and actually experienced in everyday life.

"It is the culture that makes a person Native," he said, explaining that it is a state of mind, a way of living, not just a specific blood quantum required by a federal agency.

The Native lifestyle must be lived from birth to death, Hopson said, and it involves a relationship to the land. And he said that the tragedy of Native people caught in the grip of drug and alcohol abuse is the tragedy of people who have lost touch with their culture.

"We must never allow ourselves to be separated from the land as a people," he said.

Hunting is an important part of Native culture, Hopson said, and sharing the bounty of the hunt is vital, too. Without the whale, many people would go hungry, he said, and without the sharing, Native spirit and sense of identity would deteriorate.

On the other hand, he explained that adopting new hunting methods by using snow machines and rifles doesn't mean Alaska Natives are giving up their culture.

"It's a delicate balance," he said, noting that Native culture and lifestyle do not mean a return to the past when life was a constant struggle for survival.

"Subsistence doesn't mean bows and arrows," he said.