

Culture based on traditional values

by Verne Seum

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KIANA — Aboriginal Alaskans, the Native people of Alaska, have a distinctive culture based on traditional values. These values include knowledge of language, sharing, respect for others, love for children, hard work, knowledge of family tree, disapproval of conflict, respect for nature, spirituality, humor, family roles, hunter success, domestic skills, humility and responsibility to tribe.

Inupiat Paitot People's Heritage

OPINION

All the values listed make up the Native culture by setting rules and restrictions for survival in a cruel climate. Certain values, however, describe Alaska Natives more thoroughly, such as hunter success, sharing, knowledge of language and responsibility to tribe.

Hunter success includes the right to the land and the living organisms occupying that land. Hunting exceeds the perimeter of animals. It also includes foraging plants as food.

The basis of this value, a biological cycle, was realized in centuries past by the Natives. The land provides for the plants and animals that the Natives subsist on. The land is the soil for the plants, which is the source of food for many of the animals, so Natives depend on the land.

To the Natives, hunting is not a sport, but a way of subsistence. When hunting, these people never take excessive amounts of anything. This ensures future survival for themselves and their prey.

Whether they are hunting for plants or animals, the usage of the land is important in hunting. The realization of this value indicates that one has reached maturity in the Native

community.

Sharing, the backbone of a Native community's welfare, describes the behavior of Alaska Natives and distinguishes them from the capitalistic views of Western culture. It guarantees that no one has the fear of starvation or being without a homestead.

The community provides for those who are unable to do so for themselves. Sharing also occurs when one shows affection or friendship for another. It ensures good health and strengthens the bond of the people.

Capitalism, on the other hand, is characterized by the open competition in owning the basic materials that sustain life and pleasure. This differs from the Native view by encouraging greed instead of generosity.

The Native language definitely separates Natives from Western culture. For centuries, Natives have passed on their heritage through oral history, which until recently has been told in the Native tongue. The language, the base of these cultures, made communication possible in centuries past.

This is how these distinctive cultures began. Without any form of communication, culture could not exist. Ideas and points of view would be individual and could not be passed on. The language used by Natives today mixes English and the Native language.

The Elders use their traditional language for most of their communicating, while the young employ English for the bulk of their conversations. The Native tongue links the history of these distinct people to their present and future.

Responsibility to tribe passes the legacy from one generation to the next. The legacy is the ways of the people and their values. By living the traditional way, teaching the children of their history and keeping it alive by living it, children learn not to shut out the rest of the world, but to include it in improving their lives. They learn the wisdom gained by their Elders and how to apply it to their lives.

These Native values still remain valid today. The most important responsibility to any tribe is teaching the children.

Hunter success, sharing, knowledge of language and responsibility to tribe are the basic differences in these traditional cultures and the Western culture of today. Through examination of the philosophies and values of aboriginal Alaskans, some insight has been provided to define these distinct groups of people.

Verne Seum wrote this piece in a writing class at Chukchi College, a branch campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She is a senior at Kiana High School, where her extracurricular activities include a spot on the girls' basketball team. Last summer, Seum attended UAF's Rural Alaska Honors Institute, an intensive college preparatory program for rural secondary students. Chukchi News and Information Service is a writing project of Chukchi College.

