

'Spirit Keepers' camp focuses on Native Knowledge of outdoors

Trailside Discovery Camp (TDC), a program of the Alaska Center for the Environment, has recently received a grant to develop a Native Alaskan camp program. "Spirit Keepers" will be an elementary day camp program for six to 12 year olds that explores Native uses and perceptions of the natural world. Special funding by the Frances E. Dewing Foundation of Massachusetts provides scholarships for 12 to 20 Native children and stipends for Native resource people to come and share their skills and knowledge at camp sessions.

Brainstormed over the winter by the camp's Teacher-Parent Advisory Board, Spirit Keepers aims at a 50/50 enrollment of both Native and non-Native children. Started in 1982, the camp is widely known for its excellence in environmental education and has recently been recognized as a state level exemplar program in the field of Environmental Education by the Alaska Department of Education.

Spirit Keepers will utilize the resources of local Alaska Native experts in combination with the highly qualified TDC teaching staff. The camp is known for its use of active hands-on environmental activities and games, and a focus on outdoor skills.

This approach will be combined with a learning about traditional Native subsistence skills, shelter building, nature crafts, and skill games. Various Native organizations have aided Trailside in the formulation of its curriculum and recruitment of resource people. A Native Advisory Board oversees the curriculum development.

"Right now our biggest priority is the recruitment of Native children for the Spirit Keepers weeks," pointed out Stephanie Kessler, the camp director. "We have the money to provide scholarships; we just now need to get the word out and find interested parents." Funding for the for the program came at the very last minute.

Spirit Keepers will be offered the weeks of June 16 — 20 and July 14 — 18. Camp sessions last from 8:30 a.m. — 3:30 p.m. with child care available until 5:30. The Bureau of Land Management has donated use of a part of the Campbell Creek Tract for these weeks.

Interested parents should contact Stephanie Kessler, Trailside Discovery Camp Director, at the Alaska Center for the Environment downstairs in the Sunshine Plaza Mall off 4th Avenue, or at 274-3621. Scholarships are available.