

Inmates share potlatch

For a little while, those gathered for last weekend's potlatch at the Hiland Mountain Correctional Center at Eagle River could forget they were inside a prison. There was salmon, caribou and other Native foods to eat; dancing to traditional songs, Native Dress Review and friendly competition in Indian and Eskimo Sports.

Harry John, Chief of the

Native Culture Council, judged the event a success. Not only did he feel it helped both Native and non-Native inmates to better understand the original cultures of Alaska, but it helped bring a little more attention to the issue "Alaska Native Claims - 1991," the theme of the potlatch.

Several speakers representing many Native interests addressed that subject, and spiri-

tual leader Paul Little Chief told of his own hard times battling alcohol and crime and spending time in prison, until he sought out his cultural roots and went on a vision quest.

"The whole thing was great," said council treasurer Daniel Ames. "My only regret was when I watched everybody leave, and I couldn't go with them."

For council chief Harry John, (top, opposite page) the opportunity to perform with his hometown Mentasta Lake dancers was a joyous one. Before coming to Hiland Mountain Correctional Center about six months ago, John had spent some six years in the federal prison system in the Lower 48. When he got together with his father, Fred John, (inset), it was their first reunion in six-and-a-half years.

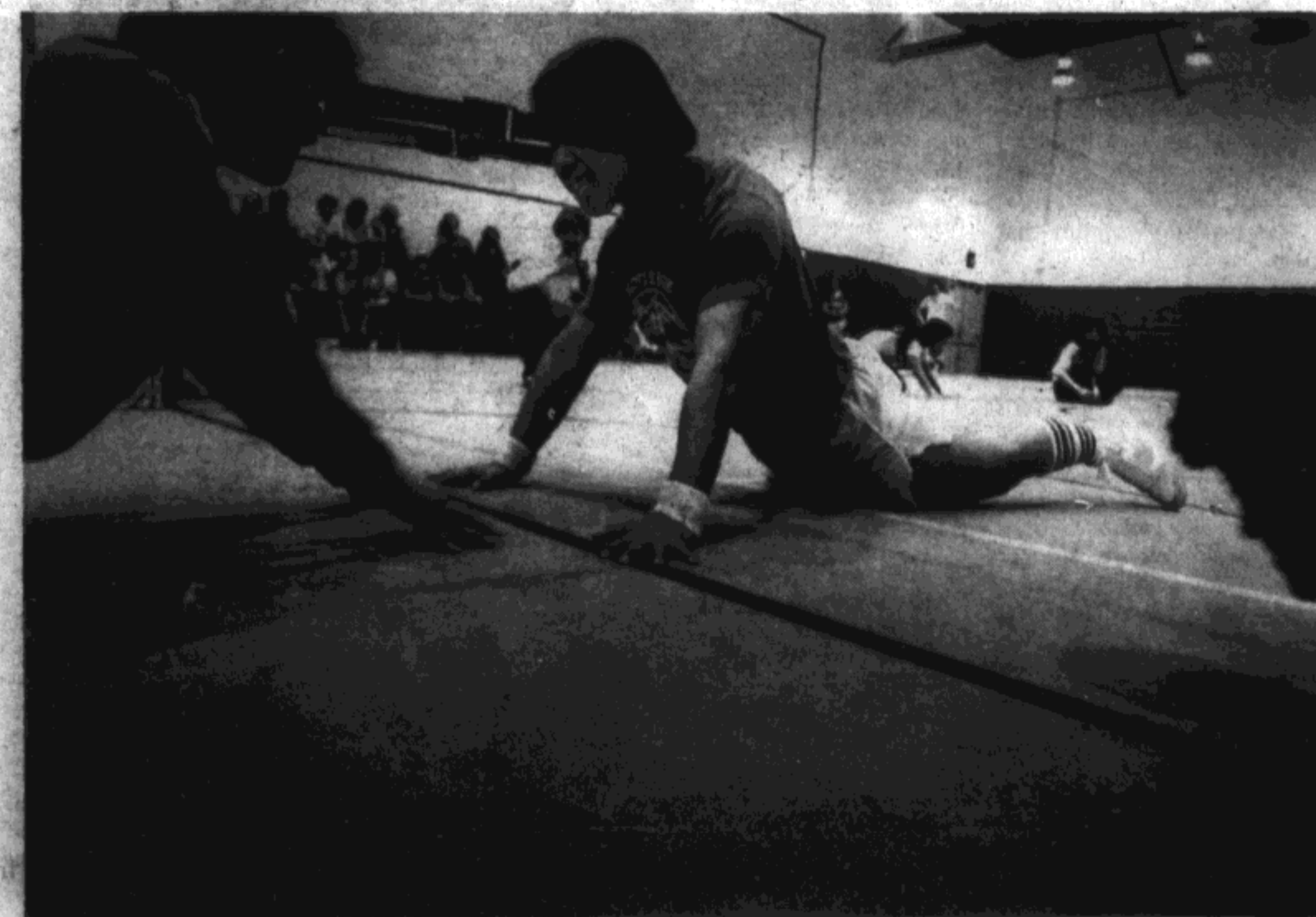
Glenn Boyles, (above) spent a little time working with dogs which have dropped out of the Iditarod sled dog race and are being cared for by the council.



Buelle Anakak was one of the guest speakers who spoke to inmates on the challenges of 1991.



Chief Harry John shares a hand-clasp with Sergeant at Arms Glenn Boyles as sub-chief Kenneth Mayo (left to right), secretary Treasurer Daniel Ames look on.



A highlight of the potlatch was a game between the Cook Inlet Native Association basketball players, one of whom is shown above, and the council.

When one of the inmates took on Greg Nothstine (left) in the headpull, he put up a good fight, but Nothstine's long skill and experience in Native games prevailed in the long run. Athletes participating in Native Youth Olympics from East High in Anchorage demonstrated all of the sports they will be competing in during preliminary competition this Saturday, and again during statewide finals next month.

PHOTOS BY BILL HESS