

Honors graduate plans work with children

FAIRBANKS — For Agnes Huntington Sweetsir, the walk across the stage at the University of Alaska Fairbanks commencement exercises May 6 was a long time coming — but it was worth it.

Twenty years ago, Sweetsir made a similar stroll to collect her diploma at Mount Edgecumbe High School in Sitka. Since then, she's gone to a business college and worked as a paraprofessional counselor in her hometown of Galena. In 1988, she decided to finish her degree in sociology, and this spring, she was named UAF's outstanding student in the discipline.

"My interest is working with abused children," says Sweetsir. "I want to work to empower the Native people to solve our own social problems, because that's where the answers will come from — from our

own empowerment."

Sweetsir graduated from UAF cum laude. It's the latest in a long line of achievements at UAF by the Huntington clan.

Last year her father, Sidney Huntington, was given an honorary doctorate by UAF for his service to the Galena schools and the Alaska Board of Game. This year, Sidney Huntington's cousin, Eliza Jones, was also given an honorary doctorate by UAF for her work documenting the Koyukon Athabaskan language.

According to Sweetsir, educational success wasn't "pushed" on her as a child or even an adult, but it was definitely encouraged. She says her recent achievements continue the family tradition of learning new things, while at the same time, not forgetting the old.

"It's a real tribute to my parents,"

says Sweetsir. "My parents have always walked in two worlds. Education has been a strong value, as has our culture. They're both important."

Also important to Sweetsir are her three children, ages 16, 13 and 6. She wanted to show her kids that everybody, no matter what their age or background, can get education if they want it badly enough.

"I think that's a big reason," says Sweetsir. "I was making a good living as a social worker, but I can't expect anyone else to do something I'm not willing to do myself."

Sweetsir's education isn't over. She plans on enrolling in the University of Washington graduate program to earn a master's degree in sociology — but she'll be back in Alaska soon.

"I'll always be in this area," says Sweetsir. "I always plan to serve the people of the Doyon region."



Agnes Sweetsir graduated cum laude.

UAF photo by Gail White