

NANA Region Opens Museum of the Arctic at Kotzebue

By MARGIE BAUMAN

KOTZEBUE — NANA Regional Corporation took another step toward development of tourism May 27, with the opening of a sleek new Museum of the Arctic here.

The occasion also marked the opening of the third floor of the Nul-Luk-Vik Hotel, on Front Street, which features two suites on the corner overlooking Kotzebue Sound.

If a strike of pilots for Wien Air Alaska kept the number of arriving guests way down, local residents came out in large numbers, despite snow flurries.

Marge Baker, a member of the Eskimo firm, toured the museum, watching the slide show, diorama and performance by Eskimo and Hawaiian dancers and pronounced it all fantastic.

"We're really proud of it," she said. From her vantage point at Baker Aviation, the air charter service she operates across the road from the new museum, she had kept a steady eye on construction.

"It certainly is an added attraction," she said. "It will help to generate more tour business."

The museum was officially opened by Robert Newlin, Noorvik, chairman of the board of NANA Regional Corp. The ribbon choice was a natural for NANA, a length of parka trim woven from threads of red, orange, yellow, black and green. The ribbon wand scissors used to cut it will be framed and displayed in the museum, along with a collection of artifacts from the area.

Cases for those artifacts were to arrive in mid-June.

The rest of the museum was all ready for the grand opening.

Working late hours, media specialist William E. Duncan of

the Seattle area created and completed a diorama which tells the history and music of the Eskimos of Northwest Alaska, and their relationship to the state's wildlife.

Jonas Brothers Collection

NANA purchased the old Jonas Brothers museum collection of stuffed wildlife earlier this year and most of the animals were transported to Kotzebue via a C-130 transport plane. A few of the smaller ones came on regularly scheduled jets, but moose, walrus, seals, caribou and other larger mammals just wouldn't fit on such flights.

Much of the material used in the diorama and an accompanying slide show, "The Roots of Kotzebue," was collected by Duncan with help from NANA's Rachael Craig and Mary Schaeffer, during an elders conference earlier this year. Duncan took over 300 color slides for the "Roots" film.

For local residents, the main attraction of the slide show is that, of course, they know every face they see in it.

The real stars of NANA's museum show are the Eskimo elders of Northwest Alaska, plus and including some members of the award-winning Kotzebue Eskimo Dancers Association.

Chester Seveck and his wife, Helen, of Point Hope, are the best known of the dance team,



KOTZEBUE'S ESKIMO DANCE TEAM—sings out the legends of the arctic at the opening of the Museum of the Arctic. Behind them are caribou, the mainstay of the diet of many people in Northwest Alaska, a food source now threatened by a depleted caribou herd. The caribou are part of a museum collection of more than four dozen birds, fish, seal, and land mammals from which people still draw subsistence.

—Photo By MARGIE BAUMAN

which also includes Aggi Kowunna, Alvey Shagloak, James Hawley, Mae Sheldon, Paul Green, Walter Kowunna, Virginia Shagloak, Hannah Hawley, Rose I-

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EVEN DANCERS GET A BREAK—Clara Forslund, left, a member of the Kotzebue Eskimo dancers, relaxes during an evening dinner honoring the opening of the Museum of the Arctic. With her, daughter Rhoda Fox, executive assistant for NANA Regional Corporation.

—Photo By MARGIE BAUMAN



CHESTER AND HELEN SEVECK—two of Alaska's most celebrated Eskimo dancers, enter the museum of the Arctic before the start of their first performance there. Chester Seveck is the president of the Kotzebue Eskimo Dancers.

—Photo By MARGIE BAUMAN

Museum project satisfies two objectives for NANA ...

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yapana and Clara Forslund.

All participated in the elders conference, which was funded under a Bicentennial grant from the federal government, through the state Bicentennial committee and by the Alaska Humanities Forum.

Along with tourism, NANA is very concerned about preserving the culture of the area. The firm's leaders feel the museum may be able to resolve both issues.

After all, as NANA President

John Schaeffer said, "This is not only for our visitors to see, but for our children."

"It will give the children a lot of knowledge about the animals of the region," said Newlin, who has ten children of his own.

Hawaiian Dancers

In fact, it was the children

who got the first look at the new showplace of Kotzebue. All grades in the Kotzebue school got a special performance by visiting Hawaiian dancers, plus a preview of the museum.

The Hawaiians, led by Charlie Maxwell, a leader of the ALOHA Association, Hawaii's

Native land claims group, have performed in Kotzebue before.

NANA Regional Corporation was the first of Alaska's Native regional firms to offer the Hawaiians financial support several years ago and they have formed a warm friendship ever since.

Most summer travelers to Kotzebue, however, will see only the regular museum show, with the Kotzebue Eskimo dancers. The Hawaiians returned

to Maui following their performance.

Only the strike of pilots for Wien Air Alaska had an effect on statewide representation at the event. Several dozen travel industry folks had been invited, along with the state's Native leadership, but few were able to make it.

Ironically, the only travel folks there were three representatives of Wien Air Alaska.