

Institute Can Perpetuate Cultures

FAIRBANKS — A \$25,000 feasibility study of an institute of Alaskan Native Arts could pave the way for a center to perpetuate the Native cultures, the arts and traditions within Alaska.

Led by Laura Bergt, a Fairbanks woman who serves on the national board of regents of the Institute of American Indian Arts at Santa Fe, N.M., the study group will take a hard look at the needs of Alaskans to preserve and encourage study of Native cultures within the state.

Official word of the grant came Oct. 15 from U.S. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, who began seeking the funds months ago with prompting from the Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

Tundra Times editor Howard Rock, a commissioner on that board, noted in a letter to Stevens that "the need for such a facility is great . . . It would be a center for the perpetuation of Native cultures, the arts and traditions. It would enhance the spirit and drive of our Native people."

Results of the survey will be included in Bureau of Indian Affairs plans for a possible central institution for training of Native artists and exhibition of their work.

Bergt feels that the resulting institute "should assist the Alaskan Natives in retaining their own cultural identity, utilizing their traditional methods and values, while extending their cultural values by learning the newest and innovative educational methods in the scientific and technological worlds."

"Too often," said Bergt, "we have seen an Alaskan Native youngster processed from his Native culture through a non-Native culture and education thus becoming confused and eventually suffering an identity loss. For too long, the Alaskan Natives have been fed full of unused knowledge because "learning" without thought or a full perceptive understanding or appreciation of a foreign culture, while smothering their own culture, is self-defeating.

"The Native . . . must learn about himself, thus enabling him to develop an understanding appreciation for the traditional Native culture, the present Native culture and the future care and growth of his heritage in keeping with and even going beyond, the times. The value of Native culture, or lack of it, has its effect on the Native because it is his heritage, his atmosphere, his personality and his life," she said.

Named to serve on the survey team with Bergt are Tom Drake of Nome and Mary Jane Fate of Fairbanks, both active in Native affairs.