

KANA group markets local arts and crafts

Arts and crafts created by Kodiak Island Native artisans are being marketed through a program of the Kodiak Area Native Association. The program emphasizes a cooperative organization and benefits buyers as well as sellers.

Dominic DiToro, a VISTA volunteer assigned to the KANA vocational rehabilitation department, began pulling the project together in December 1992. The idea is to bring Native American artisans together to give them a means for earning supplemental income. Some of the artists currently are unemployed and live a subsistence lifestyle, he said, or they have other part-time or full-time jobs but the jobs are not related to their arts and crafts. Selling their artwork would provide needed cash and promote their culture.

DiToro, an art teacher from Massachusetts, worked on a similar project on the Navajo Reservation before coming to Kodiak.

"The main thing to do now is bring the crafts people together," he said. "There are a lot of people who are already producing. They need help with marketing."

Another benefit is that creating a cooperative will help local Native people, especially youth, who want to learn arts and crafts. The cooperative project moved into a building in downtown Kodiak this summer. The new facility has tools and it gives the artists a central place to produce their work.

"There was no other organized way for people to market their work before," DiToro said. "People would simply just make something — weave a basket, carve a mask or do some fur sewing — and then just go around to shops," he said.

Besides opening a workshop, the cooperative has hosted two art shows in Kodiak, and others are planned. The first was March 19-21 during the COMFISH trade fair, and the second was May 27-31 during the Kodiak Crab Festival. The second show was in-

side the Alutiiq Culture Center, which gave people a chance to see the traditional artwork in the center's museum and to buy new works.

The original idea for the cooperative came from Joseph Kelley, vocational rehabilitation administrator at KANA, who saw that his clients needed help with marketing. Funding has come from the Alaska State Council on the Arts, which has approved a grant of \$7,500 for five instructional workshops, and from KANA.

"This started out being a program for people with disabilities. We tried to open it up to any Native artisans who wanted to learn more about their culture," Kelley said. "I've actually been working on this since 1989."

Kelley said KANA has been promoting Native art and culture for a number of years. For example, through KANA several artisans have built traditional Alutiiq skin-covered kayaks. Three of these have been sold to buyers in Japan.

"At times we've gotten discouraged, but what has taken 100 years or more to tear down can't be rebuilt in a few years," Kelley said.

Currently, about 25 artisans have joined the cooperative project, including people from Kodiak, Old Harbor and Akhiok. DiToro is developing a newsletter and eventually hopes to include membership from all of the island's six villages.

The works offered range from greeting cards featuring photographs taken by one member which sell for about \$2 each, to traditional carved wooden masks that sell for \$1,000 or more. The artists range in age from about 20 to 80.

Anyone interested in more information on the cooperative project may contact **KANA at 486-5725** in Kodiak. The workshop number is **486-3176**.

"We welcome questions from people who want more information or who want to purchase some of our items," DiToro said. ■



LEFT: KANA Arts and Crafts Project member Pat Petlit weaving a spruce root hat.

ABOVE: Old Harbor resident Albert Naumoff helping to build the framework for a Kodiak kayak.

BELOW RIGHT: KANA Arts and Crafts Project member Grace Harrod sewing a skin covering on the kayak framework.