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Winnie Dizes, a member of the Kotzebue Eskimo Dancers, drums and signs during a performance at the Museum.

'We knew the museum had to be something very special. We wanted to say to our people that ours is a thriving, living culture. Generations of Eskimos would know who they were and why. So would the rest of America.'

—Willie Hensley

NANA has formed Tour Arctic as a subsidiary to market and operate all of NANA's travel industry businesses. In addition to the excursions in Kotzebue, the list includes the Nullagvik Hotel here, the Museum of the Arctic, the Arctic Caribou Inn, a 40-room hotel on the edge of the big Prudhoe Bay oilfield, and ground tours at Prudhoe Bay.

Meet Mary Dirks and her daughter, Margie Ubben.

Mary has been named Kotzebue's official hostess for the tour program. Margie is Tour Arctic's general manager for Kotzebue operations.

They are members of a pioneer family in tourism here. Mary's late stepfather, Chester Seveck, a legendary reindeer herder, and her mother, Helen, were the original greeters in Kotzebue from 1959 until Chester's death at age 91 in 1981. The couple traveled the world, attending trade shows and appearing on television, to advertise the Arctic.

"I'm so proud of my parents," says Mary Dirks. "I have learned from them, and now I will do my best."

Daughter Margie Ubben, now 28, entered tourism by way of dancing as a teen-ager at the Museum of the Arctic. And some day, her daughter, Dawn, who will be a year old in July, will join the Eskimo dancers.

Margie says she hopes visitors will be able to remember Kotzebue as a place where old traditions are still intact, but also as part of the 20th century.

Another memorable highlight for

those visitors will be a stop at the Kotzebue Senior Citizens Cultural Center where about two dozen of the region's Eskimo elders reside in mellow surroundings.

Meet Tommy Ongtooguk, 64, admired hereabouts as something of an Arctic treasure. In 1984, high-school students in the NANA territory rated Ongtooguk as the person most responsible for connecting them to their Native heritage.

It was quite an honor for a fellow who left the Arctic for 20 years to whirl around the world as an Air Force sergeant.

"I had a big, empty feeling when I came home in 1971," Ongtooguk remembers. "Life here had changed so much that a lot of my Eskimo culture had disappeared."

Determined to preserve on film what remained of the Arctic lifestyle, Ongtooguk bought a camera and hurried to record such scenes as whaling festivals, fish camps and ancient burial grounds. His precious photo collection, other Eskimo elders say, has managed to freeze time — just in time.

It is Tommy Ongtooguk who will greet visitors this summer at the senior center.

"I'll tell the people that I have one foot in the Stone Age and the other in the Space Age, and that I'm quite comfortable in both," he says.

Welcome to Kotzebue, Alaska.

Stanton H. Patty, born and reared in Alaska, is the retired assistant travel editor of *The Seattle Times*.

Region offers tourists unique view of North

by Stanton H. Patty
for the Tundra Times

KOTZEBUE — In the brief Arctic summer, visitors stroll the main street of this Eskimo town where wooden racks are draped with strips of salmon and seal meat drying in the sunshine.

The tundra carpet around Kotzebue is bright with unexpected wildflowers. Sled dogs, restless between snow seasons, howl a sorrowful serenade.

Then you hear the crack of a drum. Then another and another. . . Eskimo dancers sway and stomp to the beat of the drums.

"And now you are learning about our roots," says a guide at the Museum of the Arctic.

For, here in this ancient place of only 3,700 inhabitants is one of Alaska's finest museums — dedicated to the preservation of a truly remarkable culture.

The \$3 million museum was opened here in 1977 by the Eskimos' NANA Development Corp., and ever since has been ranked among the North Country's top attractions.

But during those dozen years, NANA, like a shy suitor, was content to play a backstage role, relying on tour operations from faraway Seattle, to escort visitors around Kotzebue and

into the museum. No longer. This season NANA itself is taking charge of excursions here.

"Who better than our own people to present the wonders of their land?" says Willie Hensley, NANA's president. "There is a lot of pride here."

NANA, now with assets of \$65 million, was one of the 13 regional corporations created by the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. From the outset, NANA decided that it wanted to be involved in Alaska's budding travel industry.

One of the corporation's first moves was to build the 80-room Nullagvik Hotel. "Because," Hensley said, "there wasn't a decent hotel here."

Nullagvik, in the Inupiat Eskimo language, means "a place to stay." Travelers to this remote section of Alaska don't feel deprived. The full-service hotel has such amenities as satellite television and a beauty shop. And its front counter is inlaid with slabs of jade from NANA's own jade mine, 120 miles east of Kotzebue.

The key decision for NANA and its 5,000 Eskimo shareholders was to invest in the museum, a project that some Outside cynics believed would be a foolish expenditure in a tiny Arctic community.

Hensley and John Schaeffer, then NANA's president, orchestrated the museum concept. The year was 1975; something bold and distinctive was needed to build Eskimo pride.

"We knew the museum had to be something very special," Hensley recalled. "We wanted to say to our people that ours is a thriving, living culture. Generations of Eskimos would know who they were and why. So would the rest of America."

The result: A classy, sophisticated museum that would be a winner in any big city.

The program opens with a sound-and-light show. Spotlights move like spear points to a lifelike polar bear in a setting of make-believe sea ice and mountains, to a grizzly, a wolf, a walrus, seals, caribou and more — all illustrating the Eskimos' subtle pact with the animals for survival.

Then Eskimo portraits flicker across a screen in a fast-moving slide show. "Roots," Kotzebue-style. Meanwhile, live actors, with faces that seem to have dropped from the screen above demonstrate arts such as ivory carving and skin sewing.

Drums throb and voice rise in ancient chants as the Kotzebue Eskimo Dancers take center stage. Visitors are

invited to join in the closing dance.

For the finale, the Kotzebue residents demonstrate a traditional blanket toss, flinging one of their own, trampoline fashion, high into the air from a blanket of walrus skins. Blanket tossing is a sport now, but in the old days it was a useful way of seeing across ice and snow ridges to spot wildlife.

"We're really proud of the way things turned out at the museum," Hensley says. "We didn't want to do something static — that would not fit us."

John Schaeffer's indelible brand is on the Museum of the Arctic, too, but Schaeffer has a new job. He is Maj. Gen. Schaeffer, adjutant general for the Alaska Army National Guard, the first of his race to hold that rank.

And in Kotzebue now, as winter ends, the Eskimos are getting ready to go into the tour business of their own. Snug parkas are being sewn for guests to wear while visiting this town 26 miles beyond the Arctic Circle. New excursion buses are on order. Guides are being trained.

"It's a natural evolution — to take full control of our own business destiny," says Tom Dow, vice president of NANA. "We're ready."



When visitors travel to Kotzebue they often get a chance to go berry picking during their tour of the village.