

"The Spirit of Our Ancestors" preserves Athabascan culture

Denakkanaaga, Inc., the non-profit organization that represents the Elders of the Interior region of Alaska, announced the development of a new project to help preserve traditional culture and traditional ways of life. The project is titled "The Spirit Of Our Ancestors" Athabascan Cultural Preservation Program.

The Administrations For Native Americans (ANA) has awarded a large portion of the funding that Denakkanaaga applied for in October 1995 funding cycle.

"The Spirit Of Our Ancestors" project hopes to achieve four goals. They are:

- Provide governance within the Native community for the use and evolution of Native culture;
- To empower the Elders in their traditional role of transmitting the laws, cus-

oms and values of Athabascan culture;

- To make accessible the preservation efforts that have already been done, so that users of the culture may have available these rich and irreplaceable materials, and so that future developers of cultural materials can build on the base that already exists; and

- To equip village personnel with the highest-quality program models, information on resources, and the networking ability to share directions and solutions to problems.

The "Spirit Of Our Ancestors" project will work to preserve Traditional Interior Native Culture in a number of different ways. The first will be to inventory existing cultural resources. Upon this inventory, and with Elder interviews and input,

Denakkanaaga will compile a book on Athabascan laws, customs and values. In addition, "The Spirit Of Our Ancestors" project will form and maintain a cultural review board that will recommend policies for the use of culture in the region. Part of this process will include the research of recommended policies for village preservation efforts and looking at village based preservation projects in other regions to see what has or has not worked for them. "The Spirit Of Our Ancestors" project will equip villages through village development sessions and a quarterly newsletter. This will enable the

village to carry out their own village based preservation efforts.

In order to make "The Spirit Of Our Ancestors" project successful, Denakkanaaga will need the input of the Elders and members of the Interior Native communities. Denakkanaaga encourages people to drop by and say hello to the staff and to give their input on what direction they would like to see "The Spirit Of Our Ancestors" project move. An Open House is tentatively being planned in March. Denakkanaaga's offices are located at 409 Fourth Avenue in Fairbanks, Alaska.