

# Essays show nothin's worth snuffin'

The National Cancer Institute and the Alaska Area Native Health Service are once again planning a "Great Alaska Spit Out," a contest aimed at encouraging teens to avoid chewing tobacco.

The top five contestants in the 1989 contest won a trip to Washington, D.C., where they got to meet with Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and senators, as well as tour the area.

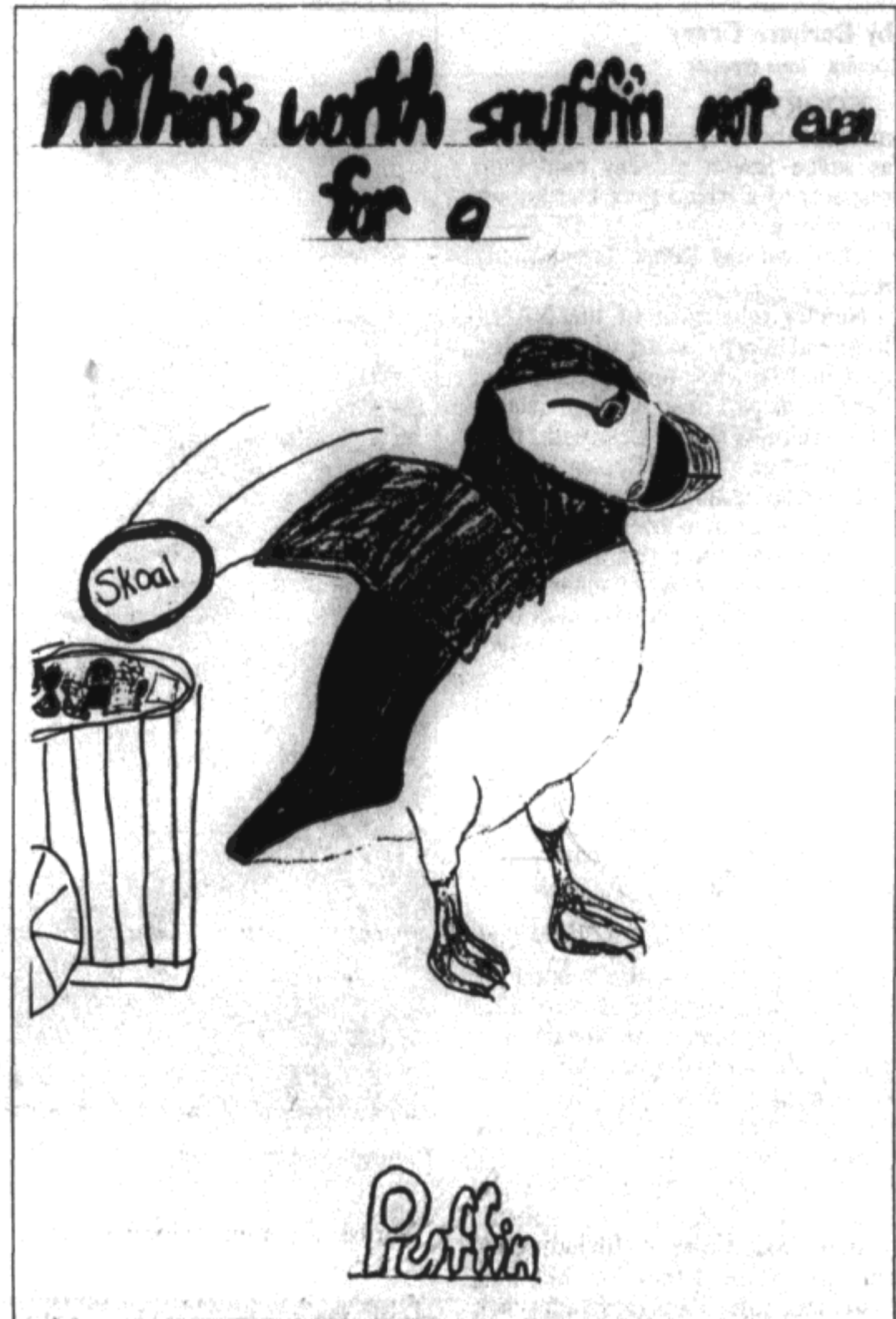
Candace Schlife, dental hygienist and consultant for the Alaska Area Native Health Service in Anchorage, said the 1989 contest was the first, but that it will be an annual event.

Smokeless tobacco has become a serious and pervasive problem among Alaska Native children, according to health officials. One of the winners, Josie Lane of Point Hope, said she has even seen 5-year-old children chewing regularly. She said she herself chewed until she won the award.

According to a 1986 survey by the Indian Health Service, 43 percent of Alaska Native boys and 34 percent of Native girls reported using chewing tobacco or snuff, and 33.7 percent of the boys and 27.5 percent of the girls used snuff and chewing tobacco on a daily basis.

These figures, according to the IHS, are among the highest rates of smokeless tobacco use in the nation. In grades four through six, 21 percent of Alaska Native children chewed tobacco, versus less than 10 percent of the nation's childhood population on the whole.

Cigarette smoking and cancer rates are also on the rise in Alaska. Smoking prevalence rates among Alaska Native teens are higher than among teens in other parts of the United States — 41 percent, compared to 12 percent of the nation as a whole.



Deborah A. Barry of Hoonah created a poster for the campaign.