Hays receives honorary degree

Ellen Hope Hays, a noted Tlingit historian, leader and educator from Sitka, was presented with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the University of Alaska Southeast Juneau campus commencement May 13.

Hays has been involved in Alaska issues including the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, serving on the Committee of One Hundred to recommend how to guide Alaska's future after the 1969 oil lease sale, and much more.

"If you live long enough," Hays says, "you gain some desired perspective while continuing to ignite thought, discussion, debate, reason, and action. I had a great time. I learned and learned. I also spoke and raised questions pretty regularly. Though I believe in the planning process, that isn't how things happened in my life."

Between 1967 and 1983, Hays advanced from a clerk/receptionist to the superintendent of the Sitka National Historical Park. She was the first Alaska Native and the first woman to be named superintendent in Alaska and among the first three women named superintendent nationally. She was also the first woman member of the Alaska Native Brotherhood.

Hays has participated in numerous museum training projects, including ones with the Smithsonian Institution and American Indian Museum Studies, and acted as guest curator at the Alaska State Museum. In addition, she presently serves as a consultant to the National Museum of the American Indian, was a founding members of Keepers of the Treasures-Alaska, and currently serves on their board.

"To be nominated for an honorary Doctor of Laws degree and be recommended by the UAS faculty selection committee," Chancellor Marshall Lind said, "the person must be distinguished in general service to the state, to learning and to humankind. Ellen Hope Hays obviously meets these criteria, and I'm extremely pleased she has chosen to receive this degree."

The University of Alaska Board of Regents has final approval for nominees to receive honorary degrees.