

# NANA Region works to revitalize Inupiat spirit

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Three organizations in the NANA Region have joined forces in a far-reaching plan to help the region retain its cultural identity and spirit.

The battle plan, joined in by the boards of the NANA Regional Corp., Mauneluk Association and the Northwest Arctic School District, has identified NANA Region Elders as the key to the Northwest Alaska's cultural survival.

The Inupiat Spirit Committee, made up of the members of the three boards of directors, recently held a meeting to discuss the cultural survival of the Inupiat to discuss the matter.

The meeting was carried live to the region of KOTZ Radio.

"This is perhaps our most important meeting since 1966," said Willie Hensley, Spirit Committee Coordinator and President of the NANA Regional Corp. "In 1966, we organized to save what we could (of Native lands) through the AFN (Alaska Federation of Natives). Now we're really fighting to keep our spirit and identity alive."

The current issue, coming some 15 years after the first battles to win the Native Claims Settlement Act, is to successfully retain the proud integrity of the Inupiat spirit and cultural identity in the modern world.

Similar social problems plague much of Native Alaska, brought about by decades of deculturalization by western civilization, but are becoming more

pronounced by the tremendous change during the last decade.

Inupiat Eskimos represent the vast majority of the residents of Northwest Alaska.

The main message of the meeting was the long-standing consensus that an understanding of Inupiat history, language and culture can only come from the region's Elders.

School Board Member Mary Schaeffer, Spirit Committee language spokesperson, said that "speaking Inupiat must start at home," reinforced by each community's oldest members.

Mrs. Schaeffer recommended that all teachers and region administrators be required to learn Inupiat, that it be used more often in the media and at public meetings, and that all public signs and announcements be in

both languages.

"Never make fun of anyone who is trying to speak the Inupiat language," said Mrs. Schaeffer, "...help them, correct them."

Spirit Committee Spokesman on Elders Robert Newlin wanted more support of the Region's Elders, linking them to the values formed learning "how to survive this harsh land."

Newlin called for the Elders to have more input in the school curriculum, that they work more closely with school principals, advisory and Regional School boards, and that they closely monitor the progress of bilingual/bicultural instruction in the schools.

Speaking on cultural values, Rachel Craig of the Northwest Arctic School District charged that the NANA Region's "dis-

connected, confused generation" was making the "big splash over the media," while the traditional Inupiat values continued to lose ground in the modern arena.

The Spirit Committee on Values identified traditional Inupiat values as knowledge of the Inupiat language, sharing, co-operation, hard work, avoidance of conflict, human respect, respect for Elders, respect for animals, humility and modesty, obligation to family, love of children, knowledge of ancestors and family tree, domestic skills, success of the hunter, spirituality, humor, and tribal responsibility.

The committee has advised parents to pass on these traditional values, daily, to their children, and to live the "Inu-

(Continued on Page 16)