

Bethel hosts 13th annual conference for sobriety

By Katrina Wade
special to Tundra Times

Bethel—A chance to connect with service providers from all over Alaska, learn about problems facing Natives and celebrate sobriety drew a large crowd here last month.

The 13th Annual Rural Providers' Conference held in the Bethel Regional High School began July 15 lasting four days.

The conference, an annual gathering in celebration of sobriety hosted this year by the Orutsaramuit Native Council, was dedicated to Lucy Olie Beaver.

Participants in the conference learn about new approaches to community-based prevention programs to combat drug abuse, according to Jeanine Kennedy, executive director of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc.

The RPC has been planned and facilitated by the conference participants since it first began in 1984 with 60 people. Since

1984, the conference has grown into a statewide movement.

"Around 600 People were expected to attend and as of July 16, around 525 registered," said Anita Nelson, information and publicity specialist for RuralCAP. "More people attended, but it's hard to count everyone coming through the door."

The conference sponsors were RuralCAP and the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corp.

"The conference provides continued support for sobriety, clean living and happy homes," said Bethel Mayor Wally Richardson.

Richardson coordinated the event with David Mousseau Jr.

There were many activities for participants to join; a sober social, salmon bake, fiddle dances, a cultural share night, workshops, a staking ceremony and a potlatch.

Workshops discussed suicide preven-

tion, inhalant abuse, grief, male and female issues, Native spirituality, anger management and traditional story telling.

Dancers from all over Alaska attended. The groups were the Upatierit Dancers, the Aniak Youth Dancers, the Chevak Tanq'ik Theater, Bethel Native Dancers and the Northern Lights Intertribal Dancers, according to Earl Polk III.

"We Are Teachers - Show Love" was this year's theme.

There are many business supporters of the conference and grants from the state and a Community Services Block Grant provided funding for this year's conference.

The staking ceremony, held on the last day of the conference, was led by Linda and Reggie Joule, Doug and Amy Modig, and John and Teresa Pingayak. The ceremony serves as a public announcement of one's commitment and symbolizes the intention of continued sobriety.