

Barnes sings flag song at UAA's commencement

When Ron Barnes grew up in Dillingham, he never dreamed he would be on stage at his commencement from the University of Alaska Anchorage, singing the Alaska Flag Song in front of 3,000 graduates and guests at the George M. Sullivan Arena.

Barnes graduated May 7 with a Bachelor of Arts in Music Performance degree and was one of two graduating seniors selected to participate in the ceremony. Graduating journalism and public communications major Connie Griffis presented the graduation address.

Traditionally the Alaska Flag Song is sung by a faculty member. This year, however, it was sung by Barnes.

From a Yupik fishing family with seven children, Barnes grew up always liking music.

"I first sang the Alaska state song at the Miss Dillingham Pageant when I was 10 years old," he said.

Teachers such as Frank and Mary Parten and others in Dillingham encouraged Barnes in music. The high school had no chorus, but he conducted the church choir at St. Seraphim of Sarov Orthodox Church in Dillingham for about two years.

In high school Barnes became fascinated by the piano. He asked his band instructor to help him, and over time he taught himself piano and learned to play a wide variety of musical instruments as well.

Beginning as a piano major, Barnes first took voice lessons at Western Washington University where he was introduced to art song.

"It was so lonely practicing piano all the time," he recalled. "The voice people on campus were always working with other people, so I got into voice; I've always liked singing anyway."

After some time in Washington, Barnes took a year off in Dillingham and then came to UAA where he was closer to home, and his friends and family were more accessible.

Kathryn Chenoweth was his first voice teacher in Anchorage and she encouraged him to join the Anchorage Community Chorus. Barnes went on the spring concert tour to Carnegie Hall in New York and Lincoln Center in Washington, D.C.

"My big boost came from the community Chorus. I sang a small solo with them and got a good reception," Barnes said. "This gave me confidence to move forward to my degree in music."



Ron Barnes is from Dillingham.