

# Tlingit troupe returns home for summer stint

by Jeff Richardson  
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The cast members of Naa Kahidi Theater spend months each year on the road, performing throughout the U.S. and abroad. For that reason, plans formulated by the Sealaska Heritage Foundation, the troupe's parent organization, for a summer season represent a significant homecoming for the acclaimed group.

Performances by Naa Kahidi Theater will be a centerpiece of the Sealaska Cultural Arts Park, scheduled to open for the summer on June 5. According to Darrell Brown, project manager, the park is the brainstorm of David Katzeek, former executive director of the Sealaska Heritage Foundation and Tim Wilson, former managing director of Naa Kahidi. Their hope was to create performance space in the heart of the state's capital to share the vitality of living Tlingit culture with local residents and tourists. In addition to live performances, an Alaska Native Artist's Market will provide local artisans an opportunity to sell and demonstrate traditional Native crafts.

The Performance Theater House will have a seating capacity of about 120 people. It will be based on the design of a traditional southeast tribal house, with a cedar screen front depicting Raven and Eagle. The building will face the Gastineau Channel and the Alaska Steam cruise ship dock.

Brown says the troupe has scheduled a 24-week season, with both morning and afternoon shows. In order to accommodate working Juneauites, 60 percent of performances have been slated for evenings and weekends.

"We wanted to have shows that locals could attend," said Brown. He noted that designing adequate performance space to fit into the

city's compact downtown center within easy reach of the cruise ships that drop off thousands of visitors each week has been an intense, intricate and ultimately successful process. "The city and the borough have been really helpful in working with us."

While the Alaska Perseverance Theater has staged a revue downtown for several seasons, Brown says he feels the cultural arts park, focusing as it does on Native culture, will complement existing attractions. He has mounted a travel industry fax blitz and been working with the tour operators who help visitors pick the attractions they want to see.

"The reception has been really positive and they've been excited," said Brown.

Performances by Naa Kahidi will feature the troupe's sharply honed style of oral literature, using traditional dance, song and storytelling techniques, as well as masks and colorful regalia. The group, whose name loosely translates from the Tlingit as "our clan house," employs this exciting style to present stories and legends of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples of southeast Alaska.

The repertoire for each Naa



Kahidi tour is different, but each consists of a so-called "dramatic anthology," a full-length body of work made up of six or seven myths or legends. Shows are also sometimes assembled for special events or au-



Traditional regalia and art objects are an integral part of Naa Kahidi's stunning performances of Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian myths and legends. The Juneau-based troupe will perform a summer season near the cruise ship dock in Juneau beginning June 5.

diences. For example, the story of the Cannibal Giant has been used as a metaphor for overcoming substance abuse. A story called Sheet Shagoon was commissioned by the Killer Whale clan to explain why they objected to the capture of Orcas in southeast Alaska. The White Sail was initially performed at the 500th anniversary celebration of Columbus' "discovery" voyage in Seville, Spain in 1992 to express an indigenous American point of view on the subject.

Naa Kahidi also acknowledges the cultures and talents of other Alaska Native cultures. The translation of an Inupiat Eskimo place name, "The place where you go to listen," will actually be the title of this year's show in Juneau. Cast members also reflect cultural diversity. They include: Darlene Bezezekoff (Aleut/Tlingit); Valerie Davidson (Yup'ik Eskimo); Paul M. Jackson, Sr. (Tlingit); Lonna Stevens (Tlingit); Gene Tagaban

(Cherokee/Tlingit/Filipino); and Gary Waid (Tlingit). Additional cast members are being selected for the summer season.

Supporting the cast are Dave

Hunsaker, artistic director; Joan Cahill, managing director; Nora Dauenhauer (Tlingit), advisor; and Anna Katzeek (Tlingit elder), advisor/translator.