

Book preserves names, stories within Cook Inlet

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

Traditional names of Athabaskan locations throughout the Cook Inlet region and the stories behind the names have been identified and preserved in *Shem Pete's Alaska*, which was written using the knowledge of Shem Pete and 32 other Dena'ina and Ahtna elders.

Pete, an Alaska Native from the former Susitna Station born sometime around 1915, identified more than 200 traditional areas over a 10-year period for the book, said Lydia Hays, executive director of The Cook Inlet Region Inc. Foundation.

Hays said the response to the newly published book, compiled and edited by James Kari and James A. Fall, has been good.

"The primary audience has been the Alaska Natives of this region," she said, explaining that she has seen many readers sit down and "really pore through the book."

The CIRI Foundation gave \$16,000 in grant funds to the Alaska Native Language Center in Fairbanks to help the research project continue, she said.

The book contains commentary by Pete as well as a listing more than 720 Dena'ina and other Native place names in Southcentral Alaska.

A three-dimensional topographic map has been made using the information gathered by Kari, an associate professor of linguistics at the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The map is

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• Book has 300 pages of locations

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now on display at the Alaska Gallery in the Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Kari used tape-recorded interviews with Pete to compile the research for the book and has been gathering the information since 1976 from Athabaskan and Ahtna elders.

The focus of the book is broad

enough to give a complete picture of the Southcentral Native lifestyle, said Fall, who helped compile the research for the book. Fall works for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

The book contains more than 300 pages of locations, songs in the Native Dena'ina language and stories told by Pete.

Kari wrote in his introduction that: "Shem is one of the most versatile

Native storytellers and historians in late twentieth-century Alaska."

Throughout the book the story of Pete and the history of his Native village is told.

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Also included in the book are many Native stories told by Pete, written in the Dena'ina language with English underneath.

The language center at UAF is currently marketing the book, but additional copies are available at the CIRI Foundation.