

Return to traditional values to find happier more stable future

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The only way for Alaska Natives to regain the happiness and stability they had in times past is to return to the traditional values of the Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts, says Willie Hensley, one of the prime movers behind the Inupiat Spirit Committee in the NANA Region.

Hensley said that only when Natives know who they are inside and return to practice their traditional values, can they enjoy relief from the massive problems which beset them.

Speaking at the 1991 seminar at the AFN convention, Hensley said he isn't certain if he should celebrate or mourn the Alaska Native Settlement Claims Act which he worked so hard to see passed 10 years ago.

"I don't know if we should celebrate or look longingly at the past and wish we could turn the clock back to when time was simpler," said Hensley.

"In the years since the passage of ANSCA, the Native corporations and Alaska Natives have worked hard to succeed in the Western industrialized, business-oriented world and have lost sight of who they are and what their values are," he said.

"Our people loved their children so much they wanted them to have a better life, that they gave the children to the white man's system to try to train them to survive. Teaching on the values was not carried on," says Hensley.

Natives accepted the Western White culture and started losing their identity and happiness.

"Everytime a Native flexed his muscles it created good for everybody but them," said Hensley who said that 80

percent of the teachers in village schools are non-Native, and 85 percent of the employees in Native corporations are non-Native.

"Everytime something is brought to our people, they forced us to change and we were the first to suffer."

Problems being experienced in the NANA region and many other areas include shareholder job retention, college graduates and land retention.

But other real and severe problems are faced by the Natives including high suicide and alcohol death rates, alcohol abuse, family breakdown, violence, vandalism, and health problems.

To solve these problems brought in from the Outside and they have been based on the Western philosophy which has not worked in Native areas because they don't account for Native needs," he said.

said, the people there have realized that they should be listening to their elders and adhering to the teachings and

beliefs that have kept them sound for untold generations — the Inupiat values.

Those values are a knowledge of the language; sharing; respect for others; cooperation; respect for elders; love of children; hard work; knowledge of the family tree; avoidance of conflict; respect for nature; spirituality; recognition of family goals, hunter success, domestic skills, humility and responsibility to the tribe.

Hensley said that "If our people don't want to survive the thing they should do is to do nothing. We are well on our way to destruction."

The Inupiat Spirit movement teaches that there is no aspect of the lives of people that should be untouched by the traditional values.

"Virtually everything we have done has made us over.

People are more dependent ... all things we tried to make life easier but in the process ... our bodies are disintegrating before our eyes. We placed a frenetic amount of energy in business and economics when in truth our people were left without leadership in more important areas."

This process must be turned around, said Hensley, or all that Natives love and hold dear will be lost. "Unless we know who we are we are lost."

"In truth we don't need the blessing from any government to know we have a common heritage. We can use the economic and educational and business system we have ... not to tear us apart but to bring us together."

Hensley's speech was enthusiastically applauded and several members of the audience said it was the best speech they had ever heard.