

Kasigluk Elders focus on preserving way of life

By Louise Donhauser

Courtesy Calista Corporation

Kasigluk — "Preserve our way of life," Elders of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta urged at a Kasigluk conference.

About 75 Elders from the Calista region gathered in the Kasigluk gymnasium from March 1 through 3.

The Elders spoke in Yupik which was translated to English by Daisy Lamont and Oscar Kawagley.

The Elders spoke of the old Yupik ways which they feel still have value today.

"The way of correcting children isn't the same now," one Elder said.

Children were never hit in the face and they were never startled awake.

Another Elder, Curt Bell of Hooper Bay, said he was not taught to read and write. But he did learn survival skills.

"Sun shining on ice will direct you to land. Feathers must be put underground. One day you may need those feathers for warmth.

"Your snowmachine doesn't tell you when it will break down. If you are lost on the tundra, dig a hole and go in it. Wear mukluks on the tundra," Bell said.

While the Elders shared their past experiences they also discussed today's issues such as education, alcohol and the retention of Yupik names.

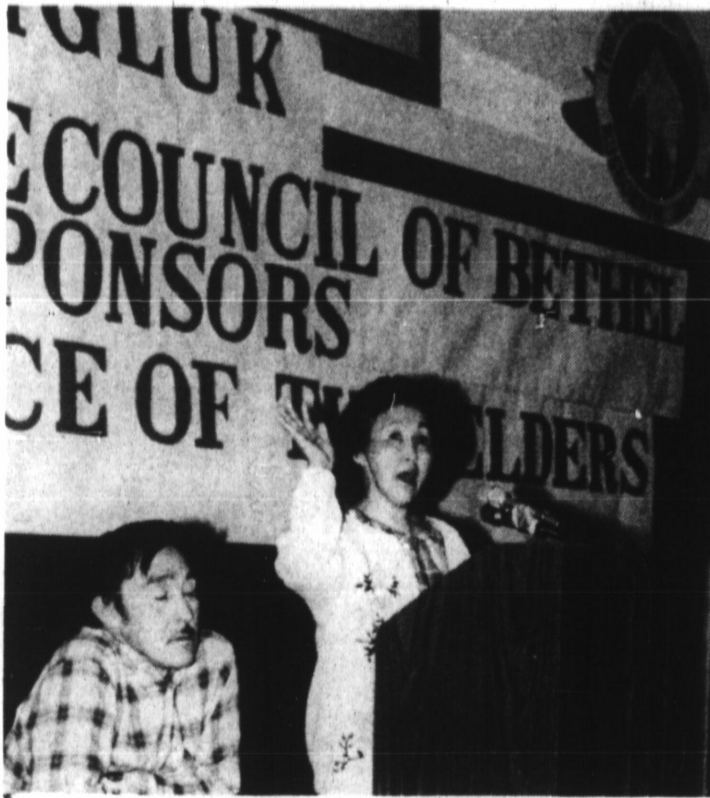
When children enter the classroom the Yupik way should not be left behind, said John Peter of Tuluksak.

"Kids are going to school and learning Western ways. Yupik ways should be included in the school system," Peter said.

He felt the younger generation should be included as speakers
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'We are the shepherd of the youth'

(Photos by Louise Donhauser)



Eliza Chase speaks at the Kasigluk Elders Conference.



Elders and young perform at the Kasigluk Elders Conference.

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at the conference to create greater impact.

Another issue the Elders discussed was alcohol.

"If a father drinks, the child learns from the father. If the mother drinks, there will be no food on the table and no clothing for the children," said Eileen Jenkins.

Alcohol can destroy a family, Jenkins said. That is why she is teaching her youngest through love.

"Avoid strong drink," Elder Jess Flint said. "Unwed mothers can be blamed on alcohol. If I were to continue to use strong drink, what would my life be like?"

On another issue, Elders said

that Yupik landmark names should be retained.

"Our lands, rivers and lakes have Yupik names. They should be posted," said Elder Paul Jenkins.

Another Elder said many of the place names in the Lower 48 were named by the forefathers of Native residents. He said the same thing should be done in Alaska.

While the Elders felt they should be respected, they also said they had a responsibility to teach young people.

"By working together with the youth, we will have a better way of life today," said Ed Weis of Tuluksak.

"The responsibility is not alone with the youth. The

world is changing. The Elders have remained silent. They have not carried out the responsibility of teaching. We are the shepherd of the young people."

James Block added that if the Elders do not pass on their skills, then the skills will be forgotten.

Because many Elders feel the lack of respect, they urged young people to honor their father and mother.

"You should serve and honor your parents. Make your parents

happy because without them you will handicap yourselves," said Joe Beaver, an Elder from Goodnews Bay.

The Elders went on to discuss many other topics, such as sharing, humility, cooperation, domestic skills, avoiding conflict and respect for nature.

The conference was made possible through personal donations from Dick Lincoln, a Tununak resident; Alex Raider, Calista Corporation president; and Gordon Schadt, attorney.

Cities and corporations making donations were Bethel Native Corporation, Calista Corporation, Chevak Company, City of Bethel, City of Tununak, City of Mountain Village, City of St. Mary's, City of Napaskiak, Tununmiut Rinit Corporation, Iq-fijouaq Company, Inc., Kusko-kwim Valley Native Association, Kwik, Inc., and Nunapitchuk Limited.

John Angaiak, general manager of Orutsarmuit Native Council of Bethel, was the organizer.