

# Sewing winners seek younger competition

As most of the contestants at the Eskimo-Indian Olympics were jumping, hopping, and stretching their muscles, three older women were sitting and watching and . . . sewing.

One of the least visible but most traditional of activities took place over the three days of games in the front left corner of the gymnasium as the women sat and sewed seal skin, beaver and moosehide in the Native sewing contest.

These women, two from Wainwright and one from Minto sat quietly practicing the craft their mothers and grandmothers taught them many years ago. It is a competition many of them wish that younger women would participate in.

The winner of this year's contest, Nannie Kagak, exchanged first place honors with last year's winner, Mae Kagak. Linda Charlie of Minto captured third place with calf-skin moccasins.

The two women from Wainwright learned their skills in seal skin from their mothers and grandmothers. Nannie Kagak said she learned from "my old mama."

She has sewed as long as she can remember but has been unable to teach her children

because most of her daughters have moved out of Wainwright while her many sons have remained.

Mae Kagak has taught her granddaughter to sew and has made mukluks for many of the Wainwright dancers, she says. Nannie Kagak says she makes parkas, boots and many other traditional garments.

Both talked about returning to the Olympics next year but both laughed and said, "I don't know, I'm getting older." Then they turned to one another and asked each others ages with big laughs.

Linda Charlie of Minto entered the sewing contest for the first time this year and started her moccasins on the first night of competition. The Kagak women both said they started their seal skin chewing and softening three days before flying to Fairbanks.

Charlie, who teaches Indian education in her Minto school, made calf-skin moccasins with a beaver ruff with moose skin.

Charlie also regrets the lack of younger women in the sewing contest but adds that she has noticed a resurgence of interest in the traditional skills lately. "You start to see young people do things that you not see for long time and I think

that's good," she said.

She said she would like to see the sewing competitors make something other than boots next year. "We should try hats or gloves."

"I tell the women you've got to learn how to sew. Some day you're going to have chil-

dren and have to do it for the kids," she says gently patting a young girl who has hovered around her. "I am teaching this girl I am raising," she adds.

Learning the traditional skills is becoming more profitable than it was in the past, she

says. "A pair of mittens used to sell for \$2.50 to \$3. Now you see them out in the hall way (at the craft sales tables) for \$80 to \$100."

Charlie says she can sew most anything save one. "I can't make parkas like those Eskimos."



Roger Kuniyak displays a pair of mukluks made by Mae Kagak.



After bidding almost \$300, Elinor Driggs rejoices, but...



...it is husband Henry who must pay the bill. Resting on his lap is daughter Torah.

PHOTOS BY BILL HESS