

Cowper visits Kwethluk

KWETHLUK — Men received decorative fingernail clippers; women salt shakers. And everyone, including Gov. Steve Cowper, got handfuls of Tootsie Rolls, bubble gum and hard candy to stuff into their parka pockets during this community's recent celebration of the Russian Orthodox Christmas.

Cowper traveled to this Kuskokwim River village while in Southwestern Alaska for a weekend of inaugural festivities in nearby Bethel. On Jan. 10, Bethel celebrated its first-ever inaugural and honored the newly elected governor in one of five such inaugural balls held around the state.

An estimated 650 Bethel area residents filled the decorated Alaska Army National Guard Armory to dance to the tunes of the Fort Richardson Army Jazz Band and enjoy sandwiches and punch. Local community leader Eddie Hoffman praised Cowper's election at the ball.

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Harry Alexie holds the star in Kwethluk ceremonies as Gov. Steve Cowper, background, looks on. Charles Mason photo courtesy Daily News Miner.

Cowper says village revives spirit

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The day after the gala affair, Cowper and his daughter, Grace, joined about 50 Kwethluk residents jammed into the home of Moses and Martha Nicolai to help celebrate "Slavic." The Russian Orthodox Christmas is observed according to the Old World calendar,

and therefore it comes after the traditional Christian Christmas.

"It was an honor to be included in the celebration," Cowper said. "It always does me good to get out of the cities, and it revives the spirit to spend some time in the villages."

As a Fairbanks-based assistant district attorney in the late 1960s,

Cowper traveled regularly to Bethel to prosecute cases. He also was a partner in a Bethel air taxi and cargo business.

Before flying to Kwethluk, Cowper met with several Bethel area fishermen, including newly elected state Rep. Lyman Hoffman, D-Bethel. Cowper told the group he

plans to appoint three new members of the state Board of Fisheries in early February.

The governor has requested suggestions from user groups, gear groups and the Native community for new members of both the Board of Fisheries and the Board of Game.