

Eklutna park opens in time for tourists

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

Summer in Alaska means tourists, and tourists who visit Alaska want to get a taste of Native culture, see historic sites and enjoy the beauty of the land.

Knakanen Corp., a subsidiary of Eklutna Native Corp., after years of planning, opened the Eklutna Village Historical Park Sunday.

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The park site is located in Eklutna and includes the already popular Eklutna Cemetery with its colorful Spirit Houses. The site also includes the historical St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, built in the 1930s. The church is the oldest standing building in the Municipality of Anchorage.

The church is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The park is in its first phase of construction. It is expected to go through three more phases within a 10-year time period before it's a full-scale Native historical park.

Kim Fullenwider, operations manager of the park, said over \$100,000 was spent on phase one of the park's construction. But she expects that money to be made back this summer. This would mean the park would have to attract an estimated 50,000 visitors this summer.

"We plan on breaking even, and it would be nice to realize a profit," Fullenwider said.

She also said tourism in Alaska is expected to be up 15 percent this year.

The long-range plans include expansion to a full-scale Native historical park, with a village scene, fish camp, Native performances and a variety of other activities.

Another long-term goal is to hire local Natives in key positions when the operation is in full swing.

The half-hour tours will be conducted by a Russian Orthodox priest or village resident. The cost is \$3.50 per person age 6 or older. The park is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily until mid September.