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Left, Assistant Professor of Alaska Native Studies, Teresa John, gives an ardent speech Thursday morning at the Wood Center on the University of Alaska -Fairbanks campus. "The heart beats of her (Sergie) life keep drumming now. Above, Carla Kintz, Acting Dean of Students, outlines new measures to be taken by students at Bartlett Hall and other dorms at UAF. Sgt. Jim McCann and Capt. John Meyers of the Alaska State Troopers, answered questions at a Press Conference at Hess Commons last Tuesday morning.

Tragedy claims life of UAF woman

Murder at UAF sparks fear, anger - many leave dorm

by Rob Stapleton
Special to the Tundra Times

FAIRBANKS - The college community and the people of Fairbanks were stunned after the body of a young college student was found in a bathtub - shot to death.

Sophie A. Sergie of Pitka's Point was found in a bath tub on the second floor of the Bartlett dorm at UAF, Monday, April 26. Sergie, who was on a leave of absence from classes this semester, was in Fairbanks to have dental work done and was visiting with one of her friends at the UAF dorm where she was staying in this Tanana Valley city.

Sergie, 20, was scheduled to fly home on Monday, the same day she was found by a janitor on the second floor coed dorm. The second floor is reserved for women and is not a floor where men are living.

"I came upstairs and one of the janitors came running out of the bathroom screaming and grabbed another girl and went into the bathroom," says UAF journalism senior, Jen Roy. The girl came out of the bathroom and told Roy what she saw. "I didn't think to go in there to see if I could help her ... it was obvious from how they were talking that she was dead." Roy, who lives on the second floor, was walking nearby during the time of discovery.

"I stood there for a long time. It didn't hit me 'til an hour later. I was thinking this couldn't be happening."

This disbelief and shock has paralyzed the student community and the teachers who live and frequent the University. Death never comes at a good time or easy to deal with, and students were in the last week of classes before finals. Most were upset beyond the point of being able to study. On Tuesday, 60 students moved out of the dorm and into friends' or families' homes. The dorm houses 671 male and female students.

The Alaska State Troopers who are handling the case announced on Tuesday Sergie's identity and started a massive canvassing of students on the upper campus dorm complex searching for clues.

Troopers appealed to the student body for help at a news conference Tuesday after announcing that they have no suspects in the slaying.

UAF Chancellor Joan Wadlow ordered flags to be flown at half mast after Troopers revealed the results of an autopsy on Wednesday.

According to Trooper Sgt. Jim McCann, the autopsy revealed that Sergie was shot to death and that

further tests are under way to determine whether Sergie was sexually assaulted. Early reports from Troopers indicated Sergie's pants had been pulled down, but there was no other indication she had been raped.

Thursday morning at an informal meeting between faculty, Troopers and students, it was apparent that students were upset about security measures and the violence on campus. After several students got up to an open microphone and discussed the conditions, all in attendance agreed that something must be done.

The dorm has no check in and out system. The bathrooms have no locks on the doors and there are no phones to make a 911 call to campus security that usually only has one officer on shift per eight hour rotation.

In an impassioned speech at the end of the gathering in the Wood Center, Theresa John, an assistant professor of the Alaska Native Studies, appealed to the crowd of 200, "It doesn't take money or police to make a community. It takes heart," said John. "It takes heart to be good human beings. The heart beats of her (Sergie) heart are drumming now,"

Continued on page 5



Sophie Sergie (left), from Pitka's Point, was found shot to death at a UAF dormitory. Emotions run deep after a speech given by Teresa John, Asst. Prof. of Alaska Native Studies. Left to right are Chancellor Joan Hadlow, Teresa John, Joann Ducharme and John's niece, Naluka, 3.

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• Murder brings security awareness

Continued from page 1

said John. Later Thursday evening, a memorial service was held to mourn and praise Sergie by the Native community on campus.

Native drummers changed a mournful song as more than 300 people quietly gathered into a circle in Constitution Plaza. Friends, teachers and university officials offered words of praise and thanks for the 20 year old Yupik woman. They called for healing, hope and forgiveness.

UAF President Jerome Komisar told the crowd that the University community learned this: 'Death has no boundaries and violence has no limits.'

"She brought with her the wisdom of 1000 years and a vision for the future," he said of the Pitka's Pt. woman.

Sergie, who was from Pitka's Pt., was an honor student in high school and received a full scholarship at UAF from British Petroleum to study marine biology.

Many who knew her thought of her as a smart, confident young woman who was a peer counselor in

high school and represented the Lower Yukon School District each year in the statewide academic decathlon.

While taking a leave from college, she held down two jobs - one as an academic aide at the village school and a second, a clerical position at a store in nearby St. Mary's. Sergie used the money she earned to pay for corrective jaw surgery.

Her friends said she did not drink or take drugs. She was concerned about the future of her Yupik culture.

Although her life was cut short by murder, she will be remembered by friends, family, and students at UAF. As a result of her tragic death, protest marches, memorials and a petition by dorm residents to Chancellor Wadlow outlinging safer, more affective security have gotten the attention of statewide daily newspapers to write editorials urging the State Legislature to fund UAF for further security needs.