



Natives pledge to fight abuse

by Heidi Bradner
for the Tundra Times

More than 200 people from villages throughout Alaska gathered at the Fairview Community Center in Anchorage May 17 to participate in a ceremony of commitment to prevent alcohol and drug abuse.

The staking ceremony, in which participants contributed soil brought from their Native communities to one container, was the heart of the day's events.

Participation represented a serious commitment to battling alcoholism.

"It means standing your ground or dying," said Phil Lane Jr., who led Alaskans in the ceremony.

Similar ceremonies of commitment are common to Native American communities throughout Canada and the United States, he said.

Lane, from the Four Worlds Development Project in Alberta, Canada, has helped Native American communities in Canada and the United States realize their ability to overcome alcoholism and drug addiction.

Lane and colleague Michael Bopp were in Alaska to make presentations



Members of the Northern Lights Drum group, top, performed at the ceremony. Below, Phil Lane, left, and Nels Johnson, right, participate.
photos by M.A. Kueber

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at the 13th Annual School on Addiction Studies, a statewide conference last week focusing on ways to combat alcoholism in rural Alaska.

People from Anchorage, Fairbanks, Bethel, Barrow, Copper Center, Kenai, Kodiak and the Matanuska-Susitna area participated in the gathering. Cultural events included drumming, dancing, poetry reading, Native

Youth Olympics demonstrations and an ethnic foods potluck.

Every Native group was represented in the gathering, and more tribes were represented this year than any other year, according to Mary Stachelrodt, director of the Amouak Alcoholism Treatment Program, one of the gathering's sponsors. Among other sponsors were the University of Alaska Addictions Studies, the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Akeela

House and the Alaska Council on Alcoholism.

This year was the first year for inclusion of the staking ceremony in the cultural events day preceeding the conference on rural abuse.

After the ceremony, Stachelrodt told participants they had been through much together.

"We've gone through a lot of emotion, a lot of exhilaration and a lot of happiness," she said.