

Chukchi College holds graduation

By Bill Hess
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Adult education in rural Alaska took a major step forward last week as Chukchi Community College in Kotzebue held commencement exercises for its first graduating class.

Seven students from the NANA Region were awarded their associate of arts degrees during the event.

Special honors were given to another student, Martha Barr, the first ex-CED graduate from Kotzebue, who received her bachelor of education degree from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, this past week.

U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski,

who delivered the commencement address, praised the graduates and the people of the NANA Region for taking a leadership role in rural adult education.

Murkowski predicted that CCC will become a model for adult education across rural Alaska.

He warned of the challenging and threatening times that lie ahead of the graduates. "Alaska Natives won't achieve economic self-determination with cultural integrity if you cannot be masters of your own destiny," Murkowski noted.

He cited problems facing Alaska Natives; the hepatitis B

epidemic, which Murkowski said will claim one of every 20 Alaska Natives; the high infant mortality rate; and the challenge of 1991, when ownership of shares in lands in the Native regional and village corporations will be opened to anybody, non-Natives included.

The senator encouraged the graduates to use their educations to help find the solutions to such problems. He also expressed confidence they will succeed.

John Schaeffer, president of the NANA Regional Corporation, passed out special awards depicting the NANA hunter
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'Educated people are the new hunters'

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emblem on jade to each of the graduates.

"When we first started NANA, we decided the most important person in Inupjaq society was the one who provided the food," Schaeffer explained. "The hunter."

He counseled that in the future Alaska Natives will need not only the traditional skills necessary to pull a living from the land and sea, but the educational and technical skills to master the modern world. He noted the high cost of living in rural Alaska and stressed that good jobs are the key to meeting those costs.

"Most of these jobs are western jobs," Schaeffer said. "They require education and training. It is important that Inupiaqs take over more of these jobs to enable them to

provide for their people," Schaeffer said. "These graduates are the new hunters," he emphasized.

Schaeffer also pointed with pride to Sam Towarak, director of CCC. "It's a real pleasure to have one of the more important institutions in our region run by an Inupiaq," Schaeffer said. "That's very important!"

Towarak, who conducted the ceremonies, also addressed the blending of the old and new. "Sometimes I think 'why work when you can go out and live off the land,'" he said. "Then I think, 'how do you get out there?'"

"Most often with boats," he answered his own question, "which burn gasoline, which costs money . . . Boy, does it cost money!" Towarak stressed

He counseled the graduates

to go to work in the office, put in their time, and then to take their reward by going out into the land and on the sea to harvest the game and the fish.

Even though subsistence is still a major part of the Alaska Native lifestyle, Towarak said, the education and technical side cannot be overlooked. The Inupiaq population is growing and nature can no longer provide for everybody, Towarak said.

Jobs must be made and filled to provide for all the people.

Towarak cited the periods of starvation which would come upon the people at regular intervals in past decades. This, he said, was nature's way of keeping the human population in balance with the food population.

To live without those periods of starvation, Towarak said, the education achieved by the graduates is necessary.

"It is still possible to continue our own way," he stressed, "and carry on in the values which your culture cherishes."

Towarak also said there is a need for unity among rural Alaskans and cited the last statewide election as a good example of what such unity can accomplish.

One way to assure unity, Towarak said, was to get more rural Alaskans educated and running the programs and industries in their own areas, rather than having to rely on outsiders whose interests may be different from their own.

Students who received their associate degrees included Jo-

sephine N. Nelson, Carolyn L. Smith, Linda Lee, Lincoln Upicksoun, Camille D. Zachares, William D. Zachares II, Cynthia Jane Palmer and Mary R. Richmond.

Martha Shields of the first Baptist Church delivered the invocation. The NANA Women's Choir performed a selection of songs.

Towarak noted that although CCC had been closed for two years before opening this year, the students who had graduated had taken courses before the shut-down and had been involved in ex-CED adult education classes in Kotzebue.

Approximately 90 students from Kotzebue, Noorvik, Noatak and Deering, were enrolled during the spring semester at CCC.