

# Veteran Inupiat leader retires from TNHA

One of our most valued resources in leadership retired last November. Joseph Upicksoun served as a Tagiugmiullu Nunamiullu Housing Authority (TNHA) commissioner from its inception in 1974. He was instrumental in its creation as an Indian housing authority to provide home ownership opportunities necessary for the betterment of the people of the North Slope.

When oil companies and outside interests began encroaching on Inupiat lands in 1961, they were met by the Arctic Slope Native Association of which Upicksoun was the first president. As other Natives around the state were feeling the effects of outside interests in the control and use of their tribal lands, Upicksoun, with other Natives from around the state, formed the Alaska Federation of Natives to pursue what is now the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). TO further pro-

tect the Inupiat's traditional lands, Upicksoun led his people to create the North Slope Borough, a municipal government.

Upicksoun is a vice president at the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, established under ANCSA. He has been instrumental in leading ASRC to become the state's most profitable Native Corporation without forgetting the sacred nature of Inupiat lands and culture.

Upicksoun has represented the needs and interests of his people for over 35 years. He has dedicated his life to his people and yet has never sought public positions of power and prestige. According to TNHA executive director Robin J. Danner, Upicksoun is a mentor who possesses great wisdom, patience and foresight.

"Joe is a humble man. He is a leader

interested in passing along his legacy of leadership, not his own name. He is gentle in correcting others and generous in bringing them along in their own roles as leaders. In a word, Joe Upicksoun is a visionary," said Danner.

As a TNHA commissioner, Upicksoun has encouraged the growth of future leaders. He envisioned the invaluable decision to contract the North Slope Borough to administer TNHA's programs and services along with their own housing programs. This decision has led to greater delivery of housing services for the entire North Slope. In addition, Upicksoun has advocated a proactive approach to solving housing needs.

While Upicksoun has encouraged TNHA's use of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs, he has also prompted TNHA to

find other solutions to its regional needs. He provided courage when TNHA endeavored to become a mortgage lender and to implement a hands-on technical assistance program. He has been a source of stability and diligence in providing housing solutions for TNHA's Native and non-Native low income residents.

Joseph Upicksoun is an example of strong Native leadership to be emulated by present and future leaders. Although he will be sorely missed, he retires with the knowledge that he has succeeded in "bringing along" the next generation of leadership.

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## • Adoption is a matter to be taken seriously

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lies! These names are critical to our continuance as Tlingit people and belong to our children and our children's children. Too many children have not been given Tlingit family names. Too many adults my age have no idea whether that have a Tlingit name or how to obtain their birthright.

Why do we give to non-Natives what we cannot seem to give to so many over-

looked young people? How can we claim that our young people are the most important thing to us when we do this to them? Do we only refer to them as the most important part of our culture when it comes to shares in a corporation? What about their traditional and tribal birthrights? Instead of putting effort into giving our clan names to non-Tlingit people, let's put effort into taking care of our own people first.

### What it means and does not mean to be adopted

At the two potlatches in Sitka, a large number of non-Tlingit people were adopted. One woman was being adopted after 20 years of friendship and service to the Tlingit community. When she saw how trivial the basis was for others to be adopted, she felt the meaning of her adoption had been minimized, and I concurred. The Kiksadi clan chief of Sitka, Al Perkins, expressed to me that non-Tlingit adoptions are a very real concern, and that protocol meetings are now addressing this issue. Some "generic" names can be given to adoptees without giving away clan names to non-Tlingits and can ease this loss of clan names.

In addition, explaining what adoption means also helps.

Adoption of non-Tlingits is simply honorary. It does not make the individual

Tlingit. Tlingit people are those who are born Tlingit. In some rare cases, those who are raised Tlingit and live Tlingit are provided a status by the clan because of their immense knowledge of the culture.

In general, adoption is honorary and gives the adoptee no status in the clan. An adoptee has no right to wear clan crests other than Eagle or Raven as a general rule, and then only at Tlingit functions. (Rare exceptions are approved by the clan leaders, not by a family.)

An adoptee cannot exploit their adoption by writing about being Tlingit, creating Tlingit art as Tlingit or holding public displays as Tlingit.

An adoptee cannot introduce themselves as Tlingit. When called to introduce themselves, they should introduce themselves by what they are in actuality. An adoptee cannot use the name given to them at adoption as their name of identity.

## • Tribal rhetoric cools

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Speculation varies as to why the Senators have shifted their position. Many observers doubt the state will succeed in its bid for a hearing before the Supreme Court. In that case, the immediate, and most important, court battle is all but over and legislative measures to define, rather than deny, tribal powers and jurisdiction might be seen as the only leverage left to tribal rights opponents.

In any case, there's a long way to go before the full effect of the *Venetie* decision is felt in Alaskan villages. In an interview with *Tundra Times* last Friday, Knowles reiterated his belief that the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provided a viable means to promote village economic independence, and that state-chartered cities and boroughs afforded a workable structure for local self-governance. He acknowledged the municipal model might warrant some changes. It is unclear exactly what expectations the state might bring to talks on defining, rather than denying, tribal power. However, Knowles said he is particularly concerned about taxation and fish and

game management.

Babbitt's special representative in Alaska, Deborah Williams, said "The department has not yet determined what its position will be if the Supreme Court decides to hear (the *Venetie* appeal)."

She indicated that Interior would be willing to participate in tribal definition discussions.

"The department would be very pleased to sit down with the parties if they decide to pursue a legislative solution regarding Indian Country parameters," she said.

Heather Kendall, an attorney for the Native American Rights Fund representing the Native Village of Venetie, welcomed the prospect of discussions. She is among those who expect the Supreme Court will not hear the state's appeal and feels that discussions on how to implement the Indian Country ruling will help bring order to a complex situation. She praised Native leaders who were in Washington last week working on the tribal rights issue for their calm, dignified and even-handed conduct.

"I was so proud," Kendall said.



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