



## *Progress Report from the Project Director*

### MORRIS THOMPSON CULTURAL AND VISITORS CENTER

May 26, 2005

Our team has been working steadily and quietly the past few months on many fronts, with a special emphasis on fundraising. Much has been accomplished...here's the latest.

- Senators Stevens and Murkowski, Congressman Young, and Governor Murkowski hosted a luncheon in Washington, DC last week to benefit the Morris Thompson Center. Though we lost Morris more than five years ago, his influence and presence is still felt strongly across the country. It was heartening to speak to so many people in our nation's capital that hold him in such high regard. We were honored to have three very special guests at the luncheon—Morris' daughter Nicole, her husband Terry and baby Shania were able to fly in for the special day. We raised more than \$50,000, and a lot of good work was accomplished that should reap additional benefits in the future.
- Two very significant gifts were announced at the DC luncheon. Totem Ocean Trailer Express President Bill Deaver came from Tacoma to present his company's pledge of \$150,000. Morris served on the board of directors of Saltchuck (TOTE's parent company) for years, and TOTE is a very generous supporter of projects that improve our community.
- Sealaska Corporation board member Byron Mallot was also on hand to announce Sealaska's commitment of \$100,000. Sealaska Board Chair Albert Kookesh said, "Facilities that honor our indigenous cultures and encourage all Alaskans to work together are vital for our state and should be embraced and supported widely." Thank you Sealaska! We've now secured just over \$850,000 in private funds, so we will be working hard to break the million dollar mark soon.
- On the state funding front, the special session of the Alaska State Legislature ended yesterday. The capital budget was the last order of business, and we are pleased that it included a grant of \$550,000 for the Center. Sam Kito, Rhonda Boyles, Steve Frank and myself all spent time in Juneau with our legislators and the governor to discuss this project and its importance to Fairbanks and the Interior. The state has now provided \$1.1 million for the Center, and we will be working hard for additional funds next year to help finish the project.
- The City of Fairbanks, a partner in this project since the late 90's, is overseeing the land acquisition process on our preferred site. City project manager Pat Smith reports that the City now owns two of the eight land parcels, and should be closing on another parcel in June. All owners have received a formal offer and negotiations continue.
- The IRS has given its blessing—the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center is now an official 501 (c) 3 non-profit corporation. This is another important milestone in the evolution of this project. Next step is to select a Board of Directors to oversee the planning and operation of the Center. One-third of the board will be appointed by the Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau, one-third will be appointed by Tanana Chiefs Conference, and the remaining third is expected to represent the National Park Service, the City of Fairbanks, and the family of Morris Thompson.
- Charles Bettisworth and Company will be back on contract soon to begin architectural design and continue exhibit planning. It will be good to begin work with our exhibit planning group again. I am planning a meeting to update our work teams and supporters on the next steps in the design of the facility, fundraising, and all aspects of the project. They will hear first-hand from CB about the ideas, challenges and timeline for the next phase of design completion.

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