

BRIDGES

Connecting People, Land and Culture

Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center



A Community Gathering Place – Alive with Activity

The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center was built to honor the legacy of the late Morris Thompson, an Alaska Native leader known for building bridges between cultures. From the beginning, a vision of the project planners was to create a community gathering place—a place where all cultures come together to celebrate one another. “It’s happening!” says Joy Shockley, cultural program director. “We are all very proud to be bringing this special legacy to life.”

variety of community-based activities, such as First Friday, daily films, special movie screenings, Wednesday beading nights, knot-tying classes, and other special events (see a list of activities for March and April inside this newsletter).

The Young Native Fiddlers fill the Center with music every Saturday. Their group has three violin and three fiddle classes going on at the same time, so music is coming from every corner of the building. “We have a place where we belong,” says fiddle group coordinator Mary-Ann Allan. “People that come in just walk



Young Native Fiddlers practice in the Center every Saturday.

Since the facility officially opened, more than 7,000 people have visited the Center to get information or to participate in a

by and smile . . . we’re giving back at the same time we’re doing what we need to do.” As the fiddlers finish up, the Yup’ik dancers carry on the music. They also meet each Saturday to practice songs and dances and to share traditional foods. “Alaska Natives have so much to be proud of, and it is a privilege to share our culture with others.” says Shockley.



Anna Peter-Raboff leads the Yup’ik dancers in song.

More than 100 Japanese visitors came to the Center recently to hear a lecture about the late Frank Yasuda, 100-seat theatre.



A Japanese tour group fills the 100-seat theatre.



A Japanese tour group browses a display of Alaska Native art.

a Japanese citizen who moved to Alaska and founded the village of Beaver. They were able to watch the Stevens Village Dancers and meet and buy work from Alaska Native artists. Several employees at the Center speak Japanese, enabling them to welcome the Japanese visitors in their own language.

The Alaska Public Lands Information Center hosts school groups and helps kids understand and connect with the land and people of Interior Alaska. Beginning next fall, the new exhibits will offer increased school field trip opportunities. “Kids will love going into our little cabin and looking out the windows at our northern lights show and seeing the moose peek in at them,” says Park Ranger Adia Cotter.



Second graders from Fairhill Christian School examine a moose hide and antlers.



MORRIS THOMPSON
CULTURAL AND VISITORS CENTER

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www.morristhompsoncenter.org

Open Daily

8am-5pm/Winter • 8am-9pm/Summer

Our Mission

The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center combines the missions of its partners to:

- Celebrate Interior Alaska’s people, land and culture
- Promote economic development with an emphasis on rural Alaska
- Be a community gathering place, where diverse cultures come together to appreciate and respect one another

To

The Best is Yet to Come!

We are the land between the mountains . . . Our lives are part of the cadence, entwined with the change of the seasons and the life of the land. This is our story. This is how we live.

Construction is complete and the doors are open, but the best is yet to come! Work is underway to transform the 9,000 sq. ft. exhibit gallery into a first-class attraction that shares our story about how we live in Interior Alaska. Soon, dioramas will come to life as rocks, plants and animals are placed in front of murals of stunning Alaskan landscapes. Videos, movies, photo/text panels, artifacts and

Alaska Native art will follow soon after. Most of the exhibits will be completed this summer. Ask us for your personal guided tour to see these exhibits take shape!



The Elder’s Hall will feature Athabascan culture and history.



In the public use cabin, the theme is “Winter sets you free!” Check out opportunities for outdoor adventure, or discover how animals survive the winter. The Bureau of Land Management has built a number of similar cabins in the White Mountains and completed this one in only a week! Thanks BLM!



Three life-sized dioramas depict activities of the seasons. In the fall diorama above, a grizzly bear digs for ground squirrels, and a hunting camp shows the importance of “bringing home the meat.”



Cliff (left) and Robert Everts of Everts Air Alaska present Project Director Cindy Schumaker a \$10,000 pledge while standing in the cockpit of the Everts flight simulator. “Everts Air Cargo has been fortunate to be a part of building and sustaining remote communities in Alaska. We take this role very seriously and are proud to continue that support with our participation in the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center,” says Robert Everts. “From its conception this project has demonstrated what can be accomplished when various cultures, organizations, businesses and every day people work together for an end goal.” The Center has received more than \$45,000 in donations in response to a recent mailing to 2,000 people. Despite tough economic times, “people have been very generous,” states Schumaker.

BUILDING PARTNERS

Alaska Geographic Store
www.alaskageographic.org
907.459.3710

Alaska Public Lands
Information Center
www.nps.gov/aplic
907.459.3730

Denakkanaaga
907.451.3904

Fairbanks Convention and
Visitors Bureau
www.explorefairbanks.com
907.456.5774

Tanana Chiefs Conference
Cultural Programs
www.tananachiefs.org
907.459.3740

Staying Connected at the Morris Thompson Center

What We're Watching

March and April Films

3 free films, 7 days a week!
Visit us at 10 a.m., noon, or 2 p.m.
to watch a free film in our 100-seat,
hi-definition theatre. Call 459.3730 for
information.

Week of March 1:

Alaska: Big America
Glacier Bay: The Grand Design
Alaska: Extreme Environment

Week of March 8:

Make Prayers to the Raven (Part 1)
Season of the Sled Dog
Alaska Portrait

Week of March 15:

Make Prayers to the Raven (Part 2)
Hot Times in Alaska *Scientific*
American Frontiers
Kuskokwim 300

Week of March 22:

Make Prayers to the Raven (Part 3)
Denali: The Living Edens
Alaska Wildlife

Week of March 29:

Make Prayers to the Raven (Part 4)
Wacky Alaskan Winter (kids)
Cooking in Alaska

Week of April 5:

Make Prayers to the Raven (Part 5)
Iditarod '85: Last Great Race
Arctic Refuge: Treasure of the North

Week of April 12:

On the Spring Ice
Alaska: Watch Our Wildlife
Gates of the Arctic: Alaska's Brooks
Range

Week of April 19:

Empty Oceans, Empty Nets
Where Rivers Meet
Wild Alaska

Week of April 26:

Farming the Seas
The Reindeer Queen
Alone in the Wilderness

Lectures, Cultural Programs, and Special Events

March

Wed, Mar 4: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, beginning and experienced bead makers gather weekly to work on their individual projects. Contact Joy Shockley @ 459.3740 for more information. We supply the beads, thread, needles and felt, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Mar 5: **Explore Alaska Series**, A Trip to the White Mountains National Recreation Area, 7 p.m.

Fri, Mar 6: **First Friday**, Pre-Performance: Fairbanks Light Opera Theatre presents Cinderella and the Prince, 5-8 p.m.

Sat, Mar 7: **Knot-Tying Workshop** with outdoor enthusiast Jason Faris, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

Wed, Mar 11: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Mar 12: **Explore Alaska Series**, Hiking the Chilkoot Trail, 7 p.m.

Fri, Mar 13: **Outdoor Forum**, Backcountry Skiing Part I – gear, cost and great locations to ski in the backcountry, 6:30 p.m.

Mon, Mar 16: **Tanana Chiefs Conference Convention Reception**, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce Urban/Rural Committee welcomes convention attendees, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Tues, Mar 17: **Open Mic Night**, Everyone invited to share poetry, songs, stories or dances of cultural or personal significance to you. Bring your families to this free event, 7-9 p.m.

Wed, Mar 18: **The Winter Bear**, Recorded film of live, staged play. Free Admission, 7 p.m.

Wed, Mar 18: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Mar 19: **Explore Alaska Series**, Rivers of Change: The Tanana Valley Watershed – Past, Present and Future, 7 p.m.

Sat, Mar 21: **Celebrate the Open North American!** Watch the classic film, "Spirit of the Wind," the true life story of George Atla, famous Alaskan sleddog musher, 2 p.m.

Wed, Mar 25: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Mar 26: **Explore Alaska Series**, Creamer's Field: Trail Etiquette for Multiple Users, 7 p.m.

Fri, Mar 27: **Outdoor Forum**, Backcountry Skiing Part II – slide show/discussion, 6:30 p.m.

Fri, Mar 27: **Athabaskan Cooking Class**, Learn to cook traditional Athabaskan Moose Soup. \$10 per family, 6-8 p.m.

April

Wed, Apr 1: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Apr 2: **Explore Alaska Series**, TBA, 7 p.m.

Fri, Apr 3: **First Friday**, Pre-Performance of Fairbanks Shakespeare Theatre's 'Romeo & Juliet'; Matt Moberly: A Pictorial History of Downtown Fairbanks, and Alaska Native Art, 5-8 p.m.

Wed, Apr 8: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Fri, Apr 10: **Outdoor Forum**, Bicycle touring workshop with Andrea Hunter, 6:30 p.m.

Fri, Sat, & Sun, Apr 10, 11 & 12: **Powwow Highway**, A Native "buddy" film. \$5 per person, 7 p.m.

Tues, Apr 14: **PBS American Experience** "We Shall Remain" series, Part I: After the Mayflower, Free Admission, 7 p.m.

Wed, Apr 15: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Apr 16: **Explore Alaska Series**, TBA, 7 p.m.

Tues, Apr 21: **PBS American Experience** "We Shall Remain" series, Part II: Tecumseh's Vision, Free Admission, 7 p.m.

Wed, Apr 22: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Apr 23: **Explore Alaska Series**, Floating the Delta Clearwater River, 7 p.m.

Fri, Apr 24: **Outdoor Forum**, Larry Bartlett will present rafting and canoeing information for beginning and experienced boaters, including how to make a boat repair in the field. Film to follow, 6:30 p.m.

Fri, Apr 24: **Athabaskan Cooking Class**, Learn to cook traditional Athabaskan Fish Ice Cream. \$10 per family, 6-8 p.m.

Sat, Apr 25: **Earth Day Celebration**, Special films, activities and information to "Keep Our Planet Green," Noon-4 p.m.

Tues, Apr 28: **PBS American Experience** "We Shall Remain" series, Part III: Trail of Tears, Free Admission, 7 p.m.

Wed, Apr 29: **Athabaskan Beading Night**, 6-8 p.m.

Thurs, Apr 30: **Explore Alaska Series**, Celebrating Birds in Culture, 7 p.m.

Call 459.3730 for information.

Looking Ahead

Cindy Schumaker, *Project Director*

With this newsletter we begin a new year—one brightened considerably by the completion of our beautiful new building. With more than \$27 million raised, construction was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. Great things happen when diverse groups join together to pursue a common goal!

We are now in the final push to raise the final \$1.3 million to complete the exhibits that will be the showcase of our facility. Three towering murals that will be the background to our life-size dioramas are already drawing rave reviews (see profile of diorama artist Jan Vriesen below). Our goal is to have the exhibits completed by the end of July, but funding will determine if we are able to meet that goal.

We are indebted to so many. Our Leadership Team, friends and donors knew they were building something that would enrich our community and our state, as well as honor one of Alaska's most successful leaders. Morris Thompson's life was dedicated to bridging cultures for the greater good. We have named this newsletter "Bridges" as a constant reminder to all of us that we have a long-term responsibility to be a fitting legacy to a great man.

We hope to see you here soon!

P.S. Have you reserved your spot on the Honor Wall? We will wait another six months or so before inscribing the first round of names on the granite wall in our lobby. The size of your inscription will depend on your total giving to the Center over the past five years. Use the enclosed envelope to join the hundreds of other Friends of the Morris Thompson Center.

People Who Make it Happen

Jan Vriesen

If you add up his works in square feet, landscape artist Jan Vriesen just might be one of the most prolific artists in the United States. For the past three months, he has spent seven days a week in the exhibit hall of the Morris Thompson Center, transforming 3,400 square feet of smooth, curved walls into three different scenes depicting summer, fall and winter in Interior Alaska. "The thing that stuck me immediately is the wonderful vastness that you have up here," says Vriesen. "I'm from Minnesota, and I can vouch for the fact that we don't have anything close to this in the Lower 48. The space you have around you is phenomenal, and frankly, for an artist, a bit intimidating."

Despite his modesty, those who drop by the Center to take a peek find his work spot-on, according to Project Director Cindy Schumaker. She said, "One man looked at the painting of the confluence of the Yukon and the Tanana rivers and exclaimed, 'I get my boat stuck right there every spring!' Another lady swore that those were real trees in the winter scene." Vriesen



has noticed that people walk right up to the wall to examine the detail. "In the end they won't be able to do that because of the foreground, but with so much detail, they may want to get out their binoculars. Trees—I've never painted this many trees!"

Over the past 35 years, Vriesen has traveled across North America painting large scale backdrops to museum dioramas. His work can be seen in the Royal British Museum in Victoria, BC, the American Museum of Natural History

in New York, as well as other museums and science centers around the U.S. and Canada. He will be in Fairbanks painting more trees through May 2009.



Our "Green" Building

Not all projects achieve the same color green! From the first meetings with the architects from Bettisworth North, the partners knew they wanted an earth-friendly design. Consider, for example:

- Lots of windows, paired with an angled roof, allows the low sun angles to penetrate the building in winter, but block the high sun angles of summer. The R-29 wall and R-40 roof construction create a highly insulated envelope.
- The design controls and treats drainage on the site using retention ponds and swales, allowing run-off to filter naturally through the ground rather than directly into the river.
- Exceeding local landscaping ordinances, plants will include indigenous perennials and specimens introduced by Fairbanks' pioneers.
- Carpet flooring has 20% post-consumer recycled content.
- A new bus shelter encourages the use of the bus system. Easy connections to downtown on the riverfront pathways encourage more walking—less driving.
- Connection to Aurora Energy's ultra-low sulfur coal steam heat system means we have no furnace, no fuel tank and no fuel emissions.

FCVB News in Brief

- The 2009 Fairbanks Visitors Guide—newly redesigned with information about Fairbanks, Interior Alaska and the Arctic—is available at the Morris Thompson Center. Contact FCVB at 456.5774 or www.explorefairbanks.com to order a guide or view an interactive edition.
- World Eskimo-Indian Olympics (WEIO) was named one of the Top 100 Events in North America for 2009 by the American Bus Association (ABA). "This honor gives WEIO an important boost in visibility among tour planners, and is a potential magnet for tourism dollars," says ABA President Peter Pantuso. It was nominated by the FCVB for the event's broad appeal, accessibility to motor coaches and skill at handling groups.

