

# THOMPSON CENTER TRACKS



## Tracking the Progress of the **Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center**

### Palin Budget Includes \$3 Million for Center

Governor Palin's revised capital budget, which was released on March 1, included \$3 million to complete the State of Alaska's investment in our project. The appropriation will bring the funding secured to \$25.3 million from a combination of federal, state, and private sources.

"This state appropriation will keep us on track for breaking ground this spring and give us the leverage to secure the remaining private funding we need," says project director Cindy Schumaker.

The project continues to enjoy statewide support. Juneau-based Sealaska Corporation has included state funding for the Center in its list of legislative priorities, and Representative Mary Nelson (D-Bethel) wrote in a letter to Palin, "Though not situated in my district, it is a project that I wholeheartedly support." In addition, more than 500 donors have given so far—large and small, businesses and individual, representing Alaska's many regions.

In December, team members Richard Wien, Steve Frank, Bert Bell and project officials met with members of the Interior Delegation before they left for Juneau. Legislators called the project "doable." Senator Wilken gave it high praise when he said it passed the "Dr. Wood test," meaning the project will be good for Fairbanks and will help revitalize downtown.

Thanks to Governor Palin and the members of the Legislature for their support of the project. Thanks also to Charlie Boddy and the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly for including the project on their priority lists again this year.

### Land Acquisition Complete

The City of Fairbanks completed land acquisition for the project site late last year, thanks to the dedication of project manager Pat Smith.

After a lengthy negotiation, the final property owner accepted the City's offer, which helped both parties avoid a costly court process to determine whether the City could exercise its right of eminent domain.

Federal and state land acquisition grants covered the total \$3.7 million cost for the site, which covers approximately three acres. The City of Fairbanks now owns the land and has entered into an agreement with the Morris Thompson Center to lease the land at a nominal rate for up to 80 years.

### Construction Contract Nearly Finalized; Groundbreaking Set for Spring

The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center is preparing to sign a \$12.5 million construction contract with Fairbanks-based GHEMM Company.

The contract amount is based on funds that are currently available. So all available funds could be directed toward construction, project planners put work on the Center's exhibits on-hold. In addition, critical items such as landscaping and paving the parking lot were removed to keep the contract within available funding levels.

"These elements will be added back in as additional funding becomes available," said Pat Smith, the Center's construction project manager. "This allows us to get started with construction at today's prices rather than waiting and facing another year of cost escalation."

GHEMM President Bert Bell has been an important addition to the project team, especially helping to explain increases in construction cost due to unprecedented escalation in construction prices.

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### Facility Occupants Sign Lease Agreements

After working together for many years with a common vision for a shared facility, project partners have made their relationship official.

The Fairbanks Convention & Visitors Bureau, National Park Service and Tanana Chiefs Conference have each signed a Memorandum of Understanding, a legal document that outlines the terms of their long-term relationship. In addition, the future occupants have each agreed

to a 10-year lease and a monthly fee based on the amount of square footage they occupy. The fees will cover the costs of operating the 38,000 square foot building.

Thompson Center Board President Deb Hickok says having these documents in place addresses concerns from some who feared the Center would need state or federal money to operate. According to Hickok, "We've said from the beginning that the Center would be sustainable. These leases demonstrate that we are serious about paying our own way."



Photos by Patrick Endres/AlaskaPhotoGraphics.

The cruise industry announced donations totaling \$300,000 to the Center, including \$150,000 from the Cruise Industry Charitable Foundation and \$50,000 each from Holland America, Princess Cruises and Royal Caribbean. Pictured left to right: Cindy Schumaker, Don Habeger, Leadership Team Vice Chair Rhonda Boyles, Matt Divens, John Shively and Don Pendergrast.

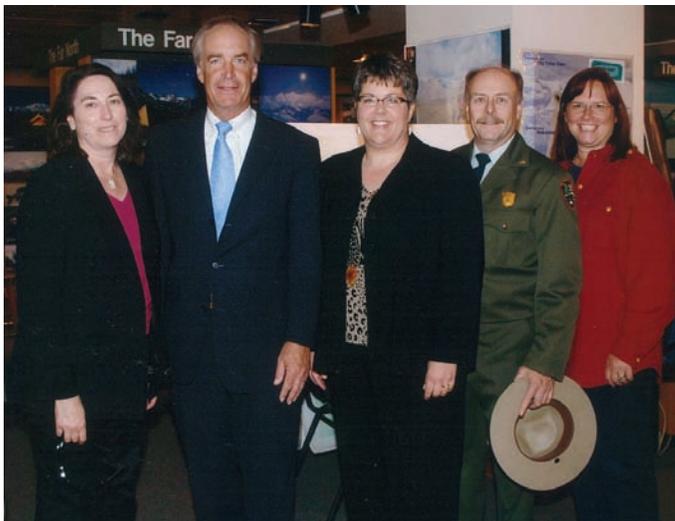


Photo courtesy the U.S. Department of the Interior.

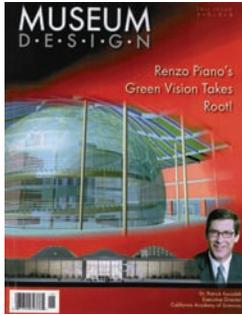
U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, second from left, met with Morris Thompson Center project partners and toured the project site during a visit to Fairbanks last fall. Also pictured are Deb Hickok, Schumaker, David Mills and Drue Pearce, special advisor for Alaska Affairs. President Bush has directed the Secretary to identify signature projects that "continue the National Park Service legacy of leveraging philanthropic, partnership and government investments for the benefit of the national parks and their visitors."

## In the News: Museum Design Magazine Features Exhibit Team

The Fall 2006 issue of Museum Design magazine featured an interview with Bianca Message, president of Andre & Associates, the Center's exhibit design firm.

Message is a stalwart supporter of the indigenous cultures of North America, and leads a "dream team" whose energy and sensitivity to our Alaskan setting has been a blessing.

In the interview\*, Message describes the firm's approach to exhibits:



"When working on First Nations museums or cultural centers, we try to transcend time. This is the essence of the living tradition. It is steeped in a rich history and continues today in a contemporary form. We enjoy showing the continuity and the change reflected in modern culture."

\* Excerpted with permission from the Fall 2006 Museum Design magazine.

She goes on to describe the design for the Center's exhibits and its foundation in Athabascan culture:

"Our design shows a contemporary fish camp, but the activity of the Athabascan people goes back long before any Russians or Europeans arrived. They still cut and smoke fish in the traditional manner, and although these fishermen and women have jobs, they still supplement their "income" with fish or game meat... We will proceed into the next design phase with the involvement of the Athabascan people building a contemporary fish camp to reflect this annual event that has been going on for generations."

One of the photos accompanying the story shows Athabascan elder Lester Erhart preparing salmon at his fish camp. Message and the design team visited several Yukon River fish camps and communities last summer to get inspiration for the exhibits.

Thompson Center Tracks is a publication to update friends and supporters on the progress of the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center a 501(c)3 charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. For more information, contact Cindy Schumaker at 907.459.3880 or [thompson.center@tananachiefs.org](mailto:thompson.center@tananachiefs.org).



## MORRIS THOMPSON CULTURAL AND VISITORS CENTER

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**Address Service Requested**



### Honoring our Elders, Supporting our Youth

—Tanya Beatus, Cultural Program Planner, Morris Thompson Center

Excerpted from an article in the February 2007 issue of *The Council*, the Tanana Chiefs Conference newsletter

"Tell your children about the clan, about Indian law, about Indian culture. This you have to teach your children." These words by Reverend Chief David Salmon remind me of what we are working towards with the Morris Thompson Center. My hope is that by creating a space that draws youth and Elders under the same roof, we can begin to reinvigorate our cultural practices and traditions, provide a positive place for our youth, allow our Elders to express themselves through education and culture, and finally give a space to our community that we can claim as our own.

We are working hard to develop the cultural programs to be offered in the facility. These programs will continue to take shape with more input from the community, new ideas and increased support. One idea to accomplish this is the notion of a technological hub in the Center—an advanced two-way communications between villages and the Center. Also, for those villages that are interested, the Center will promote existing rural tourism businesses resulting in economic development for their communities. Through bridging this gap we can begin to achieve a better understanding and greater appreciation for our rural communities.

To request a copy of the draft cultural program plan or to join the cultural program task force, please contact Tanya Beatus at 907.452.8251 ext. 3239 or [tanya.beatus@tananachiefs.org](mailto:tanya.beatus@tananachiefs.org).

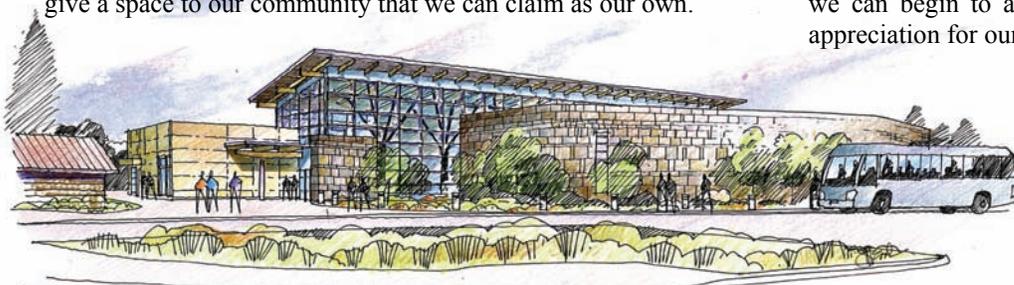


Image courtesy of Charles Bettisworth & Company