

THOMPSON CENTER TRACKS



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



Patrick Endres/AlaskaPhotoGraphics.com

Save the Date: August 12 Blessing & Dedication

Join us on August 12 as we celebrate a dream 10 years in the making: the opening of the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center.

The festivities will begin at 2 p.m. with a dedication and blessing ceremony led by Alaska Native Elders, followed by a community-wide celebratory potlatch. Featuring traditional foods like moose soup and fish strips, the potlatch will celebrate the Center's role as a multi-cultural gathering place.

"Potlatches are integral to Alaska Native culture, and this celebration will give everyone a taste of that tradition," says board president Steve Kakaruk. "This type of sharing is what the Morris Thompson Center is all about."

The Morris Thompson Center is a shared facility that will celebrate Interior Alaska's land and people, promote economic development, and create a community gathering place where diverse cultures could come together to learn to understand and appreciate one another. The opening of the building marks the beginning of the final phase of the fund-raising campaign. An additional \$616,000 is needed to complete exhibits and building start-up costs.



Photo by Ginger Placeres

ANCSA CEOs tour facility

The CEOs of the regional Alaska Native corporations and other representatives toured the nearly completed building in June with Leadership Team chair Sam Kito. The 13 corporations, created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), have donated a combined \$1 million to the project. Contributions include a lead gift of \$500,000 from Doyon, Limited; \$300,000 from Arctic Slope Regional Corporation; \$100,000 from Sealaska, \$25,000 from Chugach and CIRI; and \$10,000 from Koniag and NANA.

The group discussed plans for an exhibit on the history and significance of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which gave 44 million acres of land to Alaska Native regional and village corporations. In addition to text panels and a map of the ANCSA regions, the exhibit will feature a large glass display case with a piece of fine art representing each of the 13 regions.

Construction meets, exceeds benchmarks

With less than a month left before GHEMM Company turns over the keys, construction is meeting or exceeding three major benchmark goals: it is on budget, ahead of schedule and exceeding goals for Alaska Native hire.

"This has been a blessed project from the day we watched Chief David Salmon bless a stake that we drove into the ground underneath the building," says deputy project manager Pat Smith. "Everything is going smoother than we could have hoped."

Project partners credit both the architect, Bettisworth North, and the general contractor, GHEMM Company. Both are local firms based in Fairbanks.

"We call them the Dream Team," says project manager Cindy Schumaker. "Every day, they impress us with their commitment to a design that works for all the occupants, quality materials and exemplary workmanship. They are very committed to a building that the whole community can be proud of."

The contract with GHEMM Company set a goal of 25% Alaska Native workforce during construction. GHEMM has met or exceeded that goal every month, reaching a high of 48% Alaska Native Hire in June 2007. Thanks to the Fairbanks Building and Construction Trades Council, Alaska Works Partnership and GHEMM for working together to exceed our goal.

Exhibits on schedule for summer 2009 season

With the building nearly completed, focus has turned to the 8,000 square foot exhibit gallery. Center partners have been working with exhibit design experts André & Associates for five years to capture the story of the Interior—our people, land and culture. Now it's time to bring those stories to life.

Pam Rice, National Park Service, is heading up the exhibit process for the project partners and reports that the exhibits should be ready in May 2009, just in time for the summer visitor season.

The exhibit team has narrowed the field to two firms for the estimated \$2.5 million exhibit fabrication and installation contract: Beck Interiors (United Kingdom) and Design Craftsman (Michigan). Project partners hope to make their final selection in the coming weeks, with the finalist working through the winter on the installation.

In the meantime, diorama artist Jan Vriesen (pictured below left) will begin painting three large diorama paintings in the exhibit hall in early August. The paintings total 3,400 square feet and will depict Interior Alaska in winter, summer and fall. Vriesen has already visited Alaska several times for inspiration. Clyde and Kathy Mayo took him on a river trip from Rampart to Tanana with visits to Peggy Wright's smokehouse and Lester Erhart's fishcamp. He also visited Mission Hill in Tanana with Mike Andon. These experiences will contribute to the authentication of the diorama scenes.



Morris Thompson Center photo

Did you know...

... There's a lot of hot water flowing in downtown Fairbanks! Aurora Energy, the power plant on First Avenue, burns ultra-low sulfur coal from Usibelli Coal Mine. The plant produces steam to make electricity and feeds hot water and steam through underground pipes to safely warm buildings all over town, including the Morris Thompson Center. This means our building has no furnace, no fuel tank and no fuel emissions—all at a cost that is significantly lower than other heating methods.

When the partners in the building discussed the variety of heating methods available, it didn't take long to appreciate the benefits of connecting to Aurora Energy's district heating system.

You Can Help

Are you a Friend of the Morris Thompson Center yet? Call 907.459.3880 or go to the Thompson Center website at www.morridthompsoncenter.org to make your gift. **Your gift will be doubled** thanks to a generous grant from the Rasmuson Foundation.



Members of the Rotary Club of Fairbanks stand in front of the historic log cabin that sits on the Center's grounds. "It's so great to be a part of restoring a cabin that was built when Fairbanks was just beginning," says Rotary President Jo Heckman. Rotarians have pledged \$80,000 to restore the cabin and plant a heritage vegetable and flower garden surrounding it. Pictured above (left to right): Peggy Pollen, Karen Lundquist, Julie Estey, Joan Johnson, Peter Kelley, Jo Heckman, Denise Ferree, Barbara Schuhmann and Cindy Schumaker.



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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.

Object donations key to exhibits

A story in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* this spring (enclosed) describes the search for objects to be placed in the exhibits as "the ultimate scavenger hunt." Fortunately, community members are rising to the challenge.

For example, Randy Zarnke, Alaska Trappers Association president, has collected dozens of items for the exhibits, including beaver-gnawed trees and a 6' by 8' canvas wall tent donated by Alaska Tent and Tarp that will be used in a caribou hunting camp in the autumn diorama.

"I like that the exhibits will be all about how we live and play in Interior Alaska—things like snowmachining, trapping, fishing, hunting, and hockey," says Zarnke.



Randy Zarnke pictured with some of the items he collected with help from fellow outdoorsmen and hockey fans.

Individual support



Kyong Hollen (left), owner of *Santina's Flowers* and pictured with project director Cindy Schumaker, recently made a \$1,250 donation to the Center. "I am happy to be a supporter of a project that recognizes that Alaska's past and future successes are dependent upon the unified efforts of Alaska Natives and non-Natives alike," says Hollen, who also praised the project in a June 2008 *Community Perspective* column in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*.