

Juneau World Affairs Conference a success

By Sean Smith
Whalesong Staff

A slew of Asian Pacific leaders and experts made their way to UAS for the first Juneau World Affairs Conference (JWAC) held in the Egan Library on March 14-15 to speak to a crowd of approximately 50 people about topics ranging from Japan to the Korean nuclear crisis. The guest ranged from ambassadors to generals to a general consul to the Philippines that packed the two day event with speeches and discussions.

The guests got a chance to get their groove on Friday night at the JWAC Asia Pacific Rim Ball where the Filipino Community Dance Team did a jig as well as Sitthida Sukkamon doing an authentic Thai Dance. About 50-60 guest speakers and community members attended the ball, enjoying the Thunder Mountain Orchestra and thematic entertainment.

"The mix of speakers was excellent and (the topics were) relevant to the current world situation," Donald Hellmann, professor at University of Washington, Jackson School of International Studies, said about the variety of topics and speakers. Hellmann spoke on both days about the Korean nuclear crisis and the rise and fall of Japan.

Elizabeth Schelle, a JWAC Board member and UAS Academic Exchange Advisor, said the UAS administration feels that bringing in experts on the subject and community involvement is something that we ought to be involved in. She expressed the Board's hope that the conference will grow into a distinguished annual Pacific Rim Forum that will bring people not only from around the state, but from the entire Northwest to the UAS campus.

The president of the Juneau World Affairs Council, Bruce Botelho, said "[The conference] is a wonderful event that is clearly in the first of many here at UAS." Botelho said that the Council would like to hold the annual event at UAS in order to garner some support from students and faculty.

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foam core and mounted on a custom trailer fabricated by Brett Rotermund, proprietor of Bulletproof Trailers of North Pole, Alaska. The Lab can test nine different 4' x 8' wall panels at one time or perhaps identical pairs of walls on the north and south sides to see how wind and weather affect performance. More Mobile Test Labs will be built as money comes available. The project manager for the Building America in Alaska program is Mike Musick of Ester, Alaska.

The sponsors of the Mobile Test Lab include the Alaska State Homebuilding Association, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Fannie Mae Corporation, University of Alaska Southeast, U.S. Department of Energy Building America, and the Cold Climate Housing Research Center.

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Alaskans Institute) shortly after his arrival at UAA in fall 2001. Previous to teaching at UAA, he lived in Haines for 20 years, conducting oral history research with Tlingit elders. When Henry began teaching at UAA, he decided he was tired of seeing Native students overlooked, and was determined to do something about it.

"I knew they had stories to tell, issues to discuss. The

past 20 years have been an ache in my heart to get this out," said Henry. So after a few phone calls to prospective sponsors, the Alaska Native Oratory Society was born. Henry hopes that the contests will prompt the beginning of a bureau of Native speakers throughout the state who can be called upon to speak at various schools and events. Already, winners from last year's contest have spoken at a number of conventions around Anchorage, said Henry.

It is obvious why these speakers would be in demand. Rose Natkong's Haida philosophy story and Karla Booth's storytelling (during which she became her aunt living in Metlakatla in the 1940s and 50s) made me smile; Ekatrina Oleska's retelling of Robert Davis' poem "Saginaw: why I keep going back," and Crystal Swetzo's oratory of the relocation of her people from the Aleutian Islands to Hoonah during WWII brought

tears to my eyes. I was astounded by Karol Dixon's recitation of William Paul's "We Own the Land" speech to the American Federation of Natives Board of Directors and hypnotized by Yarrow Vaara's story of the "Good Luck Woman." Hans Chester related with humor previously undocumented information about spruce root weaving (which he discovered through personal interviews with Tlingit elders) and the significance of continuing the

weaving tradition, and Wes Roberts' and Marsha Hotch's very personal and poignant narratives stressed the importance of education and preservation of Tlingit language, respectively, for natives today. And how could I almost forget Kecia Medina's wonderfully appropriate tree analogy of Native kinship and sharing her own experience as a shy first-year student at UAS. I apologize for not including comments on anyone else's performance who I happened to miss due to rounds in more than one category being held simultaneously.

Keynote speaker Rosita Worl summed up the whole day nicely: "You have done a great tribute to your ancestors," she told the contestants. "Through your stories, you brought the knowledge and anguish they experienced...yet at the same time, you showed the strength of your ancestors."

Maybe it sounds cliché, but all participants truly were winners; not one walked away empty-handed. Each of the twenty Juneau businesses that were



Photo by Vita Wilson

UAA student Crystal Swetzo won first place in Storytelling for her rendition of "The Moon's Sister."

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