Counciller to Lead Alutiiq Museum

The Alutiiq Heritage Foundation announces that Dr. April Counciller has been selected as the Executive Director of Kodiak’s Alutiiq Museum. She will join the museum’s staff on May 11th. Counciller fills the position held for the past two years by Dr. Alisha Drabek, who is leaving the museum to pursue a new professional opportunity.

A member of the Sun’aq Tribe, Counciller grew up in Larsen Bay and Kodiak, graduating from Kodiak High School. She earned her bachelor’s degree in Anthropology and American Civilization from Brown University, and then completed a Master degree in Rural Development through the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her research was supported by a prestigious Truman Scholarship, and led to a Ph.D. in the Interdisciplinary Program in Language Planning and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, awarded by UAF in 2010.

Counciller is a familiar face at the Alutiiq Museum. She interned at the museum as both a high school and college student, and then became the manager of the museum’s Alutiiq language programs. She held this position for more than a decade, successfully designing, funding, and implementing numerous projects to preserve and share Alutiiq speech and traditions. In this role, she led a master/apprentice language instruction program that helped to develop a new generation of Kodiak Alutiiq speakers, and published resources to support Alutiiq language learning. These include a conversational phrase book and an Alutiiq orthography (writing system).

“This museum is such a source of pride for the community because through its programs we get to share our own story,” said Counciller. “I feel like the museum been part of my family for a long time now, and to rejoin the team as the Executive Director is an inspiration!”

For the past two years, Counciller has been working as an assistant professor of Alaska Native studies at Kodiak College, where she built an Alutiiq studies program, taught courses, and mentored students. During this time she served on the Koniag, Inc. board of directors, and as one of Koniag’s representatives to the Alutiiq Museum’s board of directors. She also serves on the statewide Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, as an appointee of former Alaska Governor Sean Parnell. Counciller lives in Kodiak with her husband Jeremy and their two daughters.

Margaret Roberts, the chair of the museum’s board of directors said, “It’s a pleasure to welcome April back to the museum. She has been with us for such a long time, reawakening our language, documenting our culture, and teaching Kodiak about our history. I am so proud of April and the other
young people who work so hard to preserve our culture. The museum has not only helped to grow knowledge of Alutiiq traditions, it has helped to grow a new generation of cultural leaders."

The Alutiiq Museum is a non-profit organization dedicated to celebrating Alutiiq heritage through living culture. Representatives of Kodiak Alutiiq organizations govern the museum with funding from charitable contributions, memberships, grants, contracts, and sales.