Counceller Honored for Ancestors’ Memorial Park

The Alaska Anthropological Association has awarded Dr. April Laktonen Counceller, the Executive Director of the Alutiiq Museum, its Outstanding Current Contribution Award. The award was announced Saturday at the association’s 46th annual meeting, held this year in Nome. The Alaska Anthropological Association is a statewide organization for people working, studying, and interested in all areas of northern anthropology.

The honor recognizes an individual or organization for a signature accomplishment or service to Alaskan anthropology. Counceller was acknowledged for leading the developing the Alutiiq Ancestors’ Memorial, a community space honoring the Alutiiq people and promoting historic preservation. The park lies adjacent to Kodiak’s Alutiiq Museum on a city lot in downtown Kodiak. It includes seating, a memorial ring, and a pathway with bricks engraved by community members. Interpretive signs introduce the Alutiiq people and share information about preserving ancestral settlements. The park will be dedicated in the summer of 2019. Counceller’s nomination cited her leadership in envisioning the space.

As a community leader, Counceller recognized the importance of publicly sharing and celebrating Alutiiq traditions for the entire Kodiak community. There are still serious misunderstandings about Native people in Kodiak—stereotypes that result in hurtful statements and keep people from visiting a Native museum. The park project was a direct response. By creating an outdoor exhibit, one that anyone could visit and at no cost, Counceller saw an opportunity to build awareness of Alutiiq history, promote cultural pride, protect archaeological resources, and encourage all people to remember their ancestors.

“I am grateful for this recognition, said Counceller, “but even more grateful for the many people and organizations that contributed to the memorial. The space is a public reminder of Kodiak’s rich Native history and of the importance of knowing and understanding our community’s past.”

The Alutiiq Museum is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the history and culture of the Alutiiq, an Alaska Native tribal people. Representatives of Kodiak Alutiiq organizations govern the museum with funding from charitable contributions, memberships, grants, contracts, and sales.