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Museum to Debut Exhibit on Alutiiq Plantlore

Kodiak plants and the many ways Alutiiq people use them are the subject of the Alutiiq Museum’s latest exhibit, Naut’staapet—Our Plants. The displays feature the ethnobotanical knowledge of Alutiiq harvesters combined with photographs and artifacts from the museum’s collections. Much of the information in the show comes from the research of Priscilla Russell, who visited Kodiak communities in 1990 and recorded traditional plant uses for the Kodiak Area Native Association.

“Alutiiq people continue to use plants and the show is a celebration those living traditions,” said Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counceller. “There are four major sections in the displays—for food, fuel, materials, and medicine. The display also features a banya corner, where our visitors can see what the inside of a modern steam bath and learn how steam activates plant medicines.”

The show includes an interactive art activity. Visitors are invited to make an art card showing a plant important to them. Each card features a place to draw and room for a title and artist’s name.

“The activity encourages people to think about plants in their own lives,” said Alex Painter, the museum’s exhibits coordinator and the designer and fabricator of the show. “It’s also fun to make something in the museum and leave it for others to enjoy. Some people draw local plants they love. Others are thinking about plants they rely on every day, like cotton or coffee.”

Naut’staapet opens Friday, May 3, as a First Friday event. The public is invited to enjoy the show from 5:00—7:00 pm in the museum’s gallery. In addition to the exhibit, Maggie Dellemann of Emerald Isle Essentials will share a Sitka spruce spritz made especially for the museum. This is a free public event. All are invited to attend.

Production of the exhibit was generously supported by the Munartet Partnership, the Alaska State Council on the Arts, PetroMarine, and the Kodiak Area Native Association. The show will be available in the museum’s temporary gallery for about three years.

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.

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