

# Alutiit Kasitat



The Quarterly Newsletter of the Alutiit Museum

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## Planning New Exhibits

**M**ore! For years that's what Alutiit Museum visitors have been asking. People enjoy our exhibits, but they want to see more artifacts, learn more about heritage research, explore more Alutiit artwork, and see more historic photos. Thanks to a major, upcoming renovation of the Alutiit Center Building, we are working to fulfill these requests. With support from the Exxon-Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, Koniag, Inc., Rasmuson Foundation, and the Kodiak Area Native Association, we will be transforming the entire first floor of the museum into public space. All our current exhibits will be taken down and an entirely new set of displays installed.

A \$94,376 grant to Koniag, Inc. from the Institute of Museum and Library Services will help the museum plan this major exhibit revision. The one-year *Quliyanguarwik*—Storytelling Place project, which began in July, is uniting community advisors, museum staff members, and professional exhibit designers to envision the museum's future gallery.

A six-member exhibit advisory committee of community members representing culture bearers, educators, and scientists will share ideas and review plans and designs. The museum will also host a series of public meetings to invite all interested people to participate in discussions about themes and methods

of presentation. The meetings will be facilitated by Sarah Asper-Smith, the owner of ExhibitAK, a Juneau-based design firm hired to lead exhibit planning. Asper-Smith will be assisted by Alutiit Museum Exhibits Manager Alex Painter. Alutiit Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counciller explained.

"Our goal is to create the exhibits our community wants to see, to tell the stories that are important to our people. In recent years, we've been asked to share recent Alutiit history. The museum has focused on introducing people to the Alutiit world and our ancestral culture. However, it is important to identify the forces that shaped our community—like education systems, epidemics, the formation of Native Corporations. The new exhibits will provide room for such stories, as well as space for short term displays like juried art shows and traveling exhibits."

The planning process will result in a draft exhibit script, a list of objects and images to be exhibited, concept designs, and a budget. "*Quliyanguarwik* lays the foundation for transforming community vision into museum displays," said Counciller. "We are most grateful to IMLS and to Koniag, Inc. for supporting this effort."

## Save the Date!

### Alutiit Museum Annual Meeting

Saturday, August 27th

Board Meeting @ 1:00 pm

Open House @ 1:30 – 3:00 pm

Hear presentations on recent projects, learn about museum renovation plans, see artifacts, and enjoy museum exhibits.



*A slate lance from excavations beside Karluk Lake.*

## Cama'i—Hello,

Just days ago, Margaret Agnguartha Roberts (1948–2022), the Alutiit Heritage Foundation Board Chair, passed away. This soft-spoken Alutiit Elder spent her life in service to our people. She was a pillar of the Alutiit community—a powerful voice for cultural education, wellness, and tribal sovereignty on many boards and tribal councils. In addition to her role as a community advocate, Margaret was a culture bearer. She was a founding member of the Alutiit dancers with whom she performed for over thirty years.

Learning from Elders is a deeply held Alutiit value. We rely on those who came before us to provide guidance and wisdom, and they are cherished. That's why it is so very difficult to lose an Elder. In addition to Margaret, our community and museum also recently marked the passing of emerita board member Ruth Dawson, and former board member Gordon Pullar, Senior. These Elders were cultural and tribal leaders, as well as mentors and friends to so many. We will miss their dependable presence and encouragement.

While the Alutiit Heritage Foundation and the Alutiit Museum are deeply saddened by these recent losses, we remain committed to the work they supported so passionately. Our board has organized to support the museum and we are moving forward with our work. Our three-year renovation project is well underway. We are completing a new strategic plan, envisioning future exhibits (page 1), planning a fall workshop to teach headdress making, studying an ancestral village by Karluk Lake, writing an Alutiit language textbook, and developing a cultural activity book for youth. Cultural education will continue to grow, unite, and heal, just as our Elders want.

*Quyanaa*—Thank you,

April Isiik Counciller, Executive Director



Margaret Roberts and April Counciller in France, 2016.

### ALUTIIT MUSEUM STAFF

Executive Director	April Laktonen Counciller, PhD
Director of Advancement & Operations	Djuna Davidson
Business Manager	Emily Capjohn
Chief Curator	Amy Steffian
Director of Archaeology & Special Projects	Molly Odell
Language & Living Culture Manager	Dehrich Chya
Education Manager	Leda Ferranti
Gallery Manager	Nina Gronn
Curator of Archaeology	Patrick Saltonstall
Curator of Collections	Amanda Lancaster
Exhibits Manager	Alexandra Painter
Museum Assistant	Kate McGinty
Museum Assistant	Lori Walker

### ALUTIIT HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Acting Chair	Alex Cleghorn, Koniag, Inc.
Secretary	Shauna Hegna, Koniag, Inc.
Treasurer	Lorena Skonberg, Ouzinkie Native Corporation
Board Member	Freddy Christiansen, Old Harbor Native Corporation
Board Member	Cheryl Christofferson, KANA
Board Member	Fred Coyle, Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc.
Board Member	Denise May, At-Large
Board Member	Gordon Pullar Jr., Leisnoi, Inc.
Board Member	Donene Tweten, Natives of Kodiak, Inc.
Board Member	Emerita-at-Large Rita Stevens
Open Seat	Afognak Native Corporation
Open Seat	KANA

#### Mission and Vision:

By preserving and sharing cultural traditions of the Alutiit people, we celebrate Alutiit heritage through living culture.

The Alutiit Museum is governed by Afognak Native Corporation, Akhiok-Kaguyak Inc., KANA, Koniag, Inc., Leisnoi, Inc., Natives of Kodiak, Inc., Old Harbor Native Corporation, and Ouzinkie Native Corporation. Each organization elects a representative to the Alutiit Heritage Foundation, the museum's board. Funding is provided by charitable contributions, memberships, grants, contracts, and sales from the museum store.

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# Education

## Archaeology Interns

All around the Salomie Creek valley there are ancient settlements—places where Alutiiq people lived, fished, hunted, gathered, and processed their harvests. The Alutiiq Museum has been studying the archaeological record of this remarkable area over a decade. This summer, research at the head of Womens Bay focused on a small site named Nunalleq, or Old Village with support from the landowner, Koniag, Inc. Museum archaeologists identified this site in 2019, but until this summer they knew little about its contents. A week of excavation revealed tools for hunting. Most of the artifacts from the Nunalleq site were slate lance heads and stones for sharpening their edges. These tools suggest that the site was an ancestral seal hunting camp about 5000 years ago.

A five-year education and outreach grant from the EXXON Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council and the CORaL Network allowed the Alutiiq Museum to include interns in the excavations. Hunter Simeonoff and Keaton Dolph had the opportunity to learn archaeological field methods first-hand, from how sites are identified to mapping discoveries and taking field notes. Back at the Museum, the interns helped to wash and catalog the finds, learning how artifacts are documented and stored for future study. The pair also traveled to Ouzinkie with museum staff for a day of sharing the mobile museum. This traveling display features examples of ancestral Alutiiq tools, including pieces like those found at Nunalleq.

For Dolph, participating in an archaeological excavation provided a new and exciting way of looking at Kodiak’s landscape. He explained. “What I thought was really incredible was that anywhere in Kodiak, there is a chance for there to be archaeological sites there. Our ancient history is all around us. That’s a really cool feeling as a tribal member and resident.”

Simeonoff enjoyed the opportunity to do hands-on work learning about ancient Alutiiq lifeways. “My favorite thing was finding and holding tools that my ancestors made, used, and left for us to find,” he said. “I was surprised to find a tool that had been broken, and part of it made into a new tool.”



*Intern Keaton Dolph studies Alutiiq heritage at the Nunalleq site.*

## Listening to Legends

Did you know that the Unigkuat—Kodiak Alutiiq Legends book is a podcast? Tune in to hear a community member share an Alutiiq legend. Each podcast airs on the first Friday of the month. Transport yourself into the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq world through storytelling. Learn about star people, a magical kayak, cannibals, and the suirliq—a sea monster covered in kelp! The podcasts are available on Anchor.fm (<https://anchor.fm/alutiiqmuseum>), Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and other platforms. Created with support from the Kodiak Island Borough School District READ project.



*Lynda Saqalngatak Lorseon recording at the Museum.*

### Fall Podcast Schedule

**August:** Ukreq–Ughek, told by Lynda Lorensen

**September:** The Sinew Rope, told by Dehrich Chya

**October:** Fish Boy, told by Hunter Simeonoff

**November:** The Girl Who Went in Search of Her Lover, told by Sadie Coyle

**December:** The Girl Who Married a Star, told by Susan Malutin

## Managing Digital Collections

Photographs of Kodiak villages, recordings of Elder Alutiiq speakers, videos of Alutiiq dance performances, and field notes from archaeological digs are among the materials that the Alutiiq Museum preserves in digital formats. Some of these



Photo: Digital photo of an Akhiok wedding. The original was damaged by water and preserved by scanning. Brenteson Photo Collection, AM969.

records come to the museum as “born-digital”. They were created as digital files and exist in no other format. Others began as paper or film and were later digitized. Caring for these files is as important as caring for a stone lamp or a gut skin parka. Like artifacts, audiovisual records hold valuable cultural information. Yet, there are a unique set of procedures for preserving digital files. They require specialized care.

With a \$39,807 grant from the Institute of Museum & Library Services (IMLS), the Alutiiq Museum is working to improve the care of its digital collections. With the help of a professional digital archivist, we are reviewing our procedures, setting up new protocols, and training staff at both the Alutiiq Museum and the Kodiak History Museum. The project developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased the Alutiiq Museum’s digital outreach and provided the opportunity for project funding through the American Rescue Plan. Updated procedures, training, and improved digital storage will allow both museums to provide better care for their digital collections and make it easier to share those files with our patrons.

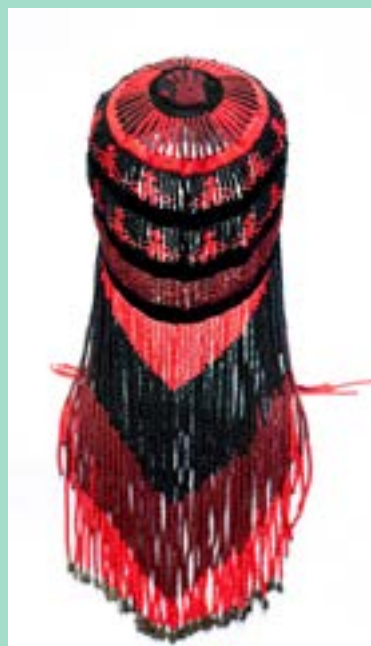
## History and Art

Artwork can tell important stories. It can show beauty or uncover ugliness, or remind us of our commonalities or reveal division. At the museum we recognize the power of artwork to share Alutiiq experiences. Just as photographs or oral histories preserve history, artwork can illustrate the forces that shape people and communities. It can help us see the world in new ways.

A beaded headdress by Kayla McDermott illustrates this power. Alutiiq headdresses are typically made for cultural gatherings and celebrations. They are symbols of pride, belonging, and beauty. McDermott’s most recent piece uses this symbol of female identity to highlight the violence and brutality disproportionately experienced by Indigenous women. Indigenous women make up about 1% of the United States population, but they are murdered at ten times the rate of other citizens.

A red handprint on the top of the headdress is the well-known symbol of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement and represents the voices that have been silenced. The second and third rows of beads feature a pattern of women holding hands. The next row features a lifeline pattern. To McDermott, this row “show[s] that we keep these women’s memories alive by sharing their

stories. It can also be interpreted as Indigenous women [looking] to each other for safety by reaching out for help.” The long strands of the train have red beads representing the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women across the country.



Until August 28th, the museum will accept proposal for pieces of visual art to add to its permanent collection. We are particularly interested in pieces like Kayla’s that reveal Alutiiq history or experiences. Learn more on our website <https://alutiiqmuseum.org/opportunity>

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, beaded headdress by Kayla McDermott, 2022. Purchased with support from Rasmuson Foundation.

# Connection

## Meet Sheryl Blackman

Sheryl Blackman always thought she was Russian. She was adopted as a baby, grew up in Oregon, and her mother told the doctor arranging the adoption that she was Russian. She had no reason to think otherwise. But some recent DNA testing and a bit of genealogical sleuthing revealed that Sheryl has Alaska Native heritage. She also found a relative in Kodiak named Florence Pestrikoff—a well-known Elder and Alutiiq language speaker. It didn't take long for an Internet search to confirm that Sheryl's roots are Alutiiq and to connect her with the Alutiiq Museum.

Since her discoveries, Sheryl has been busy studying the Alutiiq world through the museum's website. "I've done several of the crafts and have been using the language resources," she

said. "I listen to Alutiiq Word of the Week every week and have really been enjoying that as part of my routine . . . language and dance and crafts are healing. And it is such a way to reconnect and build pride in your heritage. To learn about your culture."

Along this journey, Sheryl also discovered that her grandmother was adopted and changed her name from Louisa Knagin to Lucille McLeod. This key discovery helped her to dig deeper into her family tree. She learned the names of her grandmother's siblings—Pete Knagin, Sophia Knagin, and Vera Knagin—and that the family was originally from Afognak. Through the Native Village of Afognak's online photo catalog, Sheryl found a picture of her great aunt Vera Knagin Wasille. The picture had family information penciled around the image. Family names, places where people lived and who they married, and even a note that Lucy (Luisa) was adopted by the McLeod family in Oregon. Finding this image was a turning point for Sheryl and increased her desire to visit Kodiak.

In July, Sheryl and her husband took a special trip to the island to learn more about her ancestors and their homeland. She spent a full day at the Alutiiq Museum, touring the gallery and collections room, reviewing historical records, and connecting with relatives. Through her ties to Florence Pestrikoff, Sheryl learned that she is also related to Lori Harford, one of our Museum Assistants, and Kariona Harford, a museum intern! A quick phone call, and all four women had the chance to visit in our gallery.

Sheryl was thrilled with her time at the Museum and said, "You guys . . . can help people outside of the community connect. I know I am not the only one out there. I know there are other lost Alutiiq people that need to come home."



*Sheryl Blackman at the Alutiiq Museum, July 2022*

## Shop Alutiiq

Each time you purchase a piece of genuine Native artwork, you help an artist live their culture. It's not easy to make a living as a painter, a jeweler, or a weaver, but every sale makes way for another creation. Every purchase fuels more exploration. Shop in our gallery and online store for unique gifts that support the Alutiiq arts. <https://alutiiqmuseumstore.org/>



*From left: Pendant by Yvonne Mullan, necklace by Natalia Schneider, and earrings by LaRita Laktonen-Ward*

# Support

## Membership Matters

History. Art. Culture. Connection.

These small words make a big impact. By shining light on the Alutiiq world and helping our patrons explore to the beauty and ingenuity of Alutiiq traditions, we deepen understanding and promote cultural pride. When you invest in the Alutiiq Museum, great things happen. Become a member now and support the work that makes connection possible.

<https://alutiiqmuseum.org/give>

## Sponsors



CONNECT WITH US



*Ata, agluryirtuq! – Look, a rainbow just appeared!*