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FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES 2015 FIRST NATIONS FUTURES FELLOWS

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ANCHORAGE, Alaska – First Alaskans Institute is proud to announce the selection of our 4th Alaska Native cohort of First Nations Futures Program (FNFP) fellows. This Fellowship represents a unique alliance of indigenous peoples with varied cultural traditions in different parts of the world, bonded by strong connection to community and the future of our peoples. This partnership includes Kamehameha Schools (Hawai'i), Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (Māori of the southern islands of Aotearoa - New Zealand), Stanford University, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and First Alaskans Institute. This transformative program features an intensive two week institute at the Woods Center for the Environment at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

The Institute will be convened October 25 – November 8, 2015 and will include 6 Maori, 6 Native Hawaiian and 6 Alaska Native fellows who exemplify a strong commitment to our lands, cultures, and peoples, and the protection and perpetuation of our ways of life. This international indigenous exchange strengthens connections across geographic, cultural and linguistic boundaries, and reinforces how indigenous peoples collaborate and uplift one another to enforce systemic and long-term change utilizing the gifts passed down from our Ancestors.

Our First Alaskans Institute FNFP Fellows are from throughout Alaska and bring diverse perspectives and experiences to this unique leadership opportunity for generally mid-career/community people: Edwin Bifelt (Koyukon Athabascan) from Huslia, Sarah Aanshaawat'k'i Dybdahl (Tlingit) from Klawock, Patuk Glenn (Iñupiaq) from Barrow, James Maasak Mills (Iñupiaq) from Noatak, Alexandra Valdés (Athabascan/Tlingit) from Kuiu Island and Seattle, and Kelsey Ciugun Wallace (Yup'ik) from Bethel. We look forward to seeing what real life projects and initiatives these Fellows will pursue in efforts to better their communities, Alaska and our global community.

EDWIN BIFELT (Koyukon)

My name is Edwin Bifelt and I am Koyukon Athabascan from the Interior Alaska community of Huslia. I am the owner/principal consultant of Zane Hills Capital, LLC a strategic research and consulting firm focusing on small business start-up, strategic management consulting and ANCSA/Tribal land services.

I earned a B.B.A in Finance in 2009 and an M.B.A in 2013 from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Previously, I worked for the Huslia Tribal Council as a grant writer and for K'oyitl'ots'ina, Limited (KCorp), our ANCSA village corporation as the Lands and Shareholder Relations manager. I have six years of experience working with Alaska Native corporations and Tribes and past experience in the construction industry. I am a shareholder of Doyon, Limited, the ANCSA regional corporation from my area and KCorp. I am a member of the Huslia Tribe.

In my free time I enjoy sports, hunting, fishing (and the tons of other outdoor activities that come with living in rural Alaska) and spending time with my family, friends and seven month old son Bobby.



SARAH DYBDAHL (Tlingit)

Aanshaawatk'i is my Tlingit name, and I am of the Taakw.aaneidi clan from Klawock, Alaska.

Currently, I serve as the Executive Director for Huna Heritage Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the culture and language for the Hoonah Tlingit.

I received my BA in Anthropology from Southern Oregon University.



On why this fellowship is important at this time: “As an army of 1, I’m looking forward to building this organization to develop the educational programming for the community of Hoonah.”

PATUK GLENN (Iñupiaq)

My name is Patuk Glenn and I am an Iñupiaq from Barrow, Alaska. I have spent most of my life in Barrow, where I hold a deep connection to our whaling way of life. In 2014 I moved to the greater Anchorage area where I finished my Bachelor’s degree in Rural Development. Before moving I worked as Museum Curator of the Iñupiat Heritage Center under the local municipality for 5 years. I now



work for Arctic Slope Regional Corporation as Community Economic Development Project Manager.

Within my professional career I’ve worked to link modern technology with traditional culture. I’ve brought elders and youth together to facilitate conversations and hands-on learning. I’ve documented traditions and stories and shared them with those interested. I’ve always searched for that balance of modern and traditional, in ways that enrich life.

All of my accomplishments can be attributed to those who helped raise me and shape me into the person I am today. Without my parents, my elders and my community I would have not grown up with a strong sense of self-identity. My experiences with fellow community members have given me the seed of encouragement to continue. It is my responsibility to carry on, perpetuating our way of life.

On looking to the future: “This has become my life’s work, to do all that I can to learn the world around me, and how we can plan and prepare for our future.”

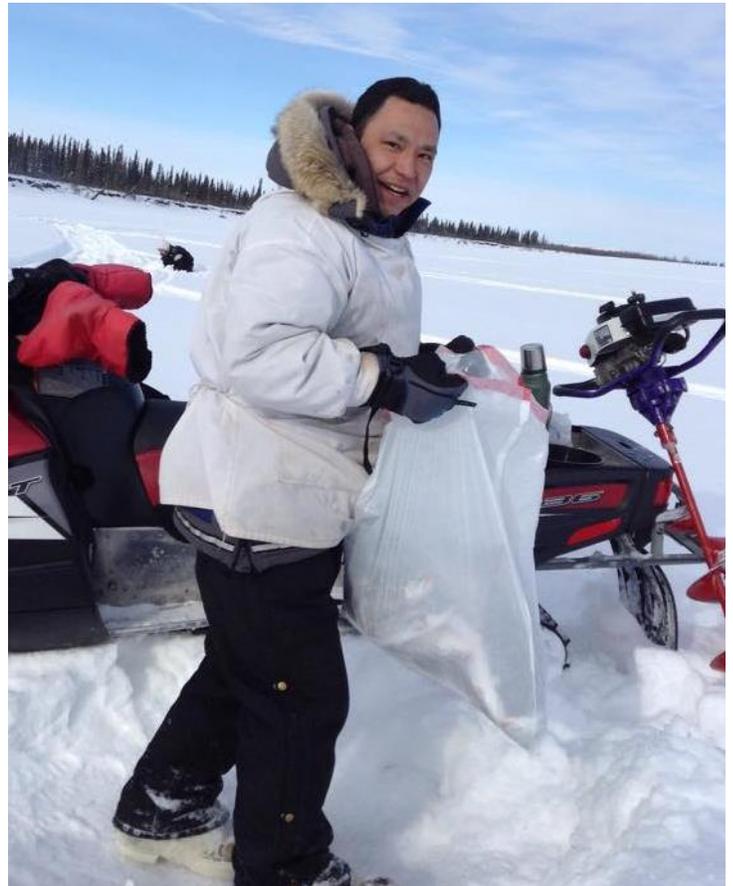
JAMES MAASAK MILLS (Iñupiaq)

My name is James Mills or Maasak as many people call me. I am from Noatak, Alaska which is an Inupiaq village in the northwestern part of the state. My childhood included traveling to Kotzebue by boat every summer and returning after the commercial fishing was all done, about mid-August. Like many people in Noatak, hunting, fishing, gathering and harvesting is an important activity and very much a part of my life. It ties me to my roots and reaffirms my traditional identity.

Education is also an important part of my life as it brings a better understanding of the world around me. Growing up in a small, remote village can feel isolated from mainstream society and many things can seem foreign. It is very important to learn about how the “outside world” operates as many things dictate how a village can be run and what resources are available for sustainability issues.

I graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) with a B.A. in Geography and a minor in Rural Development in 2011. After graduation I stayed home and participated in our full ways of life cycle that I grew up in. This reawakened my inner self and reaffirmed my place in the Noatak. In 2013, I moved back to Fairbanks to pursue a Masters in Rural Development. This program has really added value to my understanding of the world we live in now. I hope to finish up soon and return to my village to help with development related issues. My MA project focuses on traditional identity and post-secondary education in Noatak.

On looking forward to the experience with our Maori and Hawaiian family: “I see this as a good experience to learn about indigenous leadership besides Alaska.”



ALEXANDRA VALDÉS (Tlingit)

My name is Alexandra Valdés and I am child of the Athabascan and a grandchild of the Tlingit. I am Eagle Killer Whale and my family is originally from Kuiu Island, AK. I was born and raised in Seattle, WA.

I have a Master of Public Policy from the University of Southern California and a Bachelors of Arts in Political Science from Brown University. In 2013 after graduating from my Master's program I began working for Sealaska as a research analyst in the Operations Department. In 2014 I transitioned roles and began managing Sealaska's Shareholder & Descendant Internship Program. As a two time former intern myself it has been incredibly rewarding to reinvigorate Sealaska's commitment to our internship program and the development of our Shareholders and Descendants. Recently, due to my work with the internship program I have broadened my role with professional development and am now the Learning & Development Project Manager. My other work experience includes working at the Seattle Indian Health Board's Urban Indian Health Institute as a project assistant and as a health policy fellow for the Kaiser Family Foundation focusing on racial and ethnic health disparities.



On being curious about the program: “How corporations and indigenous groups develop future leaders.”

KELSEY CIUGUN WALLACE (Yup'ik)

Originally from Bethel, Alaska, I decided to stay in Alaska to pursue educational goals surrounded by rich Alaska Native cultures, languages, practices, and traditions. I incorporate traditional values, such as hard work, into both personal and professional goals. I hold a Bachelor's in Rural Development with a concentration in Indigenous Organization Management, as well as a minor in Yup'ik Language. At the Alaska Native Heritage Center, I implement marketing strategies and events.

On cherishing Native cultures: "I love fish camp, our subsistence, and am excited about working towards a positive future for our peoples."



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About First Alaskans Institute

First Alaskans Institute works to advance Alaska Native peoples through community engagement, information and research, and leadership development.

Our Vision: Progress for the next ten thousand years...

Our Mission: True to identity, heritage, and values, Alaska Natives are informed and engaged in leading the decisions that shape the future.

Our Values: Integrity, Respect, Native Knowledge, Responsibility

To learn more about First Alaskans Institute, visit www.firstalaskans.org.

To learn more about the First Nations Futures Program, visit www.fnfp.org.