

First Alaskans Institute

News Release

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Part Land, Part Water – Always Native **2017 First Alaskans Institute Elders & Youth Conference Keynote Speakers** **celebrate our Native identity, our relationship with our homelands,** **and living our Ways of Life.**

Anchorage, Alaska – Our identity as indigenous peoples is informed by our deep connection to our lands and waters, no matter where we live and no matter which indigenous cultures we are blessed to be part of. Our 2017 FAI Elder & Youth Conference theme “Part Land, Part Water – Always Native,” recognizes that Alaska always was – and always will be – a Native place. The keynote speakers for the 34th Annual FAI Elders & Youth Conference live and work in that truth.



Clare Swan (on the left)



Chris Apassingok

Elder Keynote

Dena'ina Athabascan Elder Clare Swan of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe was born and raised on the Kenai Peninsula. Clare has been married to her husband, Van, for 67 years, and they have four grown children, eleven grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.

She has long worked to preserve and protect the Native fishing rights of the Kenaitze. Clare spent two decades immersed in research and litigation, culminating in the Kenaitze Indian Tribe receiving state regulations and rights on the eve of open fishing in June 1989. Clare also worked to establish the Cook Inlet Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. She was Chair of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe from 1980 to 1995, and was instrumental in establishing the Dena'ina Health Clinic and youth and community agricultural programs. She served on the CIRI Board of Directors from 1991 to 2006, and the Board of Directors of Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) starting in 1998, leading as Board Chair since 2000.

Her contributions to the Alaska Native community has long been appreciated and recognized. In 2009, Clare was honored with the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) President's Award for Elder of the Year, and she was inducted into the Alaska Women's Hall of Fame in 2011. CIRI presented her with the 2013 Shareholder of the Year Award for over 40 years of community work. This year, she was honored by CITC with the naming of the Clare Swan Early Head Start Child Care Center. She is a bundle of energy and a lighting force for our peoples. Clare's values are based in the strength of family, service to community, and the belief in achieving the greatest potential for our peoples.

Youth Keynote

Siberian Yupik youth Chris Agragiiq Apassingok is from Gambell, a village located on St. Lawrence Island. At 16 years old, he loves hunting, whaling and practices Siberian Yupik language every day. Chris is a student at Gambell School and loves playing basketball. Chris' parents are Susan and Daniel Apassingok. His paternal grandparents are Anders and late Luceen Apassingok, and maternal grandparents are Mike and Debbie Apatiki. Chris' grandfathers were successful whaling captains in their time as captains. His father, Daniel, landed three whales with Chris serving as a striker and co-captain.

Chris started hunting seals with his father as a toddler, and by the age of five he was on his dad's crew for walrus hunting and whaling. Chris struck and killed a whale at the age of 11 and struck another at the age of 16. In addition to whale and walrus, Chris hunts seals, birds, polar bear and reindeer. He brings food to his Elders and has great respect for them. In 2016 he was honored with the "Young Providers Award" by Bering Straits Native Corporation for contributing to the health and well-being of his community on a daily basis.

One morning, Chris had breakfast with his mom before going whaling and she advised, "Always pray while you're out there and God will hear you." Chris's response was, "Mom, I pray and ask God to finish my story of hunting every day."

Additional Conference Highlights

The annual Elders & Youth Conference is a one-of-a-kind convening that works to lift up the faces of our peoples while connecting youth to our Elders. We engage in critical dialogues on issues to amplify the voice of our Elders and our youth. Through presentations, discussions, and hands-on activities, we encourage positive change and cultural action within our Alaska Native community. We focus on building relationships, sharing and strengthening our knowledge, and celebrating who we are as culturally distinct, diverse and beautiful Alaska Native peoples.

The 34th annual statewide conference starts with a special Warming of the Hands Pre-session and Welcome Dinner. The next two days are filled with interactive, hands-on cultural workshop sessions to celebrate who we are as Native peoples and utilize that knowledge to enhance our engagement in all other offerings of the conference. Activities, such as weaving, beading, working on hides, making drums, and the like, promote and strengthen our ways of life through transference of knowledge between Elders and youth. Relevant community issues-based and content-themed workshops take place in leadership and education, culture, values and language, health, wellness and safety, and land, law and policy. Men's and Women's Houses honor our peoples' ways of sharing through dialogue, creating healing spaces, and utilizes our peoples' rites of passage knowledge.

Throughout our conference there are cultural performances, as well as an opportunity to showcase the talents of our participants during the 6th Annual Chin'an Night taking place on Monday, October 16th from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM at the Dena'ina Center. Tickets will be sold at registration and at the door for \$5 a ticket. Chin'an is a public event. On Tuesday night, a special private event for our registered participants is a dance concert featuring *A Tribe Called Red*, an incredible First Nations DJ group made up DJ NDN, Bear Witness, and Zoolman – who use electronic music to blend instrumental [hip hop](#), [reggae](#), [moombahton](#) and [dubstep](#)-influenced dance music with elements of [indigenous peoples' music](#), particularly vocal chanting and drumming. They also utilize their platform to advance a strength-based social justice message using their music, imagery, and Native dancing to create a thriving, dynamic sound that brings everyone to the dance floor.

We could not put on the conference without the love and support of our community, of our volunteers, and of our sponsors! We thank everyone for working with us in partnership to help bring the most important people in our community together – our Elders and our youth!

Broadcast and Webcast

Those not able to attend in person are invited to watch the conference live on GCI channel 1, 360North, and via our website: www.firstalaskans.org.

Registration

Registration is available online until October 16th at www.firstalaskans.org and onsite registration will begin at 7:30 a.m. on Monday, October 16th at the Dena'ina Center. The registration fee is \$45.00 for youth, chaperones, and other adult participants, while the fee is waived for Elders.

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About First Alaskans Institute

At First Alaskans Institute, we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love.

To learn more about us and what we do, please visit our website at www.firstalaskans.org, contact us at 907-677-1700 or via email at info@firstalaskans.org.