

First Alaskans Institute

News Release

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2019 PUBLIC POLICY FELLOWS ANNOUNCED, MARKING 12 YEARS OF PLACING NATIVE LEADERS IN THE OFFICES OF STATE POLICY-MAKERS

Anchorage, Alaska – We are excited to announce **Jasmine Kóot Xheech Mattson-Wolff** (Tlingit), **Hunter K’ax Yeik Meachum** (Tlingit), **Anastasia Ciuguun Pleasant** (Yup’ik/Iñupiaq), **Olivia Piyyuuk Shields** (Yup’ik) and **Martin Stepetin, Sr.** (Unangax) will serve as our 12th cohort of Fellows in the First Alaskans Institute (FAI) Public Policy Fellowship. This fellowship is based in the Alaska Legislative and Executive branches. The Fellows will be immersed in the state lawmaking process, contributing their capacity to their host offices and deepening their understanding of Alaska’s issues. They will strengthen their leadership skills, and sharpen their knowledge, voice, and advocacy, while serving as ambassadors of their peoples, cultures, and communities.

FAI launched the Public Policy Fellowship in 2008 and has since placed 29 Fellows in 15 Alaska Legislative and Executive offices. In selecting Fellows, FAI seeks Native leaders who can jump in and swim upstream in the fast-moving waters of the legislative session. Desired outcomes of the fellowship include familiarity and comfortability in this forum in order to be stronger advocates for their communities and issues they care about. Many of our alums have continued on to pursue careers and community leadership roles directly utilizing their fellowship experience. They are involved in high level policy making, community organizing, and in political affairs at the tribal, federal, state, local and international levels.

We are proud to introduce the 2019 cohort of FAI Public Policy Fellowship:

Jasmine Kóot Xheech Mattson-Wolff grew up in Pelican and lives in Juneau. She often visits her parents in her hometown. Kóot Xheech is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in Alaska Native Languages & Studies and Psychology at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). She is involved with activities and clubs, like Woch.een, Campus Inclusivity Alliance and Whalesong newspaper. Kóot Xheech is an advocate for an equitable, healthy, inclusive and thriving campus. She volunteered with AWARE and completed advocacy training to end gender- and race-based violence. Kóot Xheech has also been part of many ANDORE (Alaska Native Dialogues on Racial Equity) community dialogues. She is a photographer and writer and also practices culinary arts. Kóot Xheech will serve in the office of **Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins**.



Kóot Xheech prepping coho salmon for smoking. Photo by Royce Mattson

Hunter K’ax Yeik Meachum is of the Eagle moiety and is Kaagwaantaan from the Two Door House and the House on the Water. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Sociology with a minor in Leadership Studies from the University of Colorado Boulder. K’ax Yeik was an intern at the Native American Rights Fund, a teaching assistant for the Ethnic Living and Learning Community Leadership Program, and a tri-executive of the Oyaté Native American Student Organization. In high school, she was a foreign exchange student in Costa Rica. K’ax Yeik has been an active member of the Alaska Native Sisterhood Glacier Valley Camp 70 since childhood. She has recently held a position with Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest and Hawaii advocating for reproductive justice. K’ax Yeik will serve in the office of **Representative Sara Hannan**.



K’ax Yeik atop Mt. Juneau. Photo by Dabney Meachum

Anastasia Ciuguun Pleasant is from Bethel and currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from UAS. Her parents are Julius Pleasant, Sr. of Nome and Martha Pleasant of Bethel. Ciuguun's great paternal grandmother, Hilma Otton of Koyuk, was a medicine woman with vast knowledge of medicines from the land; and her great paternal grandfather, Billy Otton of Koyuk, was a highly respected hunter known as "Sookiayuk" meaning fast runner. She draws ample strength from her lineage and relies on it every day. Ciuguun was a multidisciplinary team coordinator for Children's Advocacy Center in Bethel where she developed her advocacy voice and learned to critically analyze situations to give proper care to families in the Yukon Kuskokwim (YK) Delta region. She cherished working for an organization striving to ease the trauma of child sexual abuse and connect families to resources to support them so they can begin the healing process. Ciuguun will serve in the office of **Representative Tiffany Zulkosky**.



Ciuguun made a fish skin shaman mask. Photo by Julius Pleasant, Sr.

Olivia Piiyuuk Shields is from the village of Nunakauyaq (Toksook Bay). Her parents are Dr. Panigkaq Agatha John-Shields and Samuel Shields, Jr. Her maternal grandparents are the late Chief Dr. Kangrilnguq Paul John and Anguyaluk Martina John of Toksook Bay. Piiyuuk's paternal grandparents are the late Earline Richardson and the late Samuel Shields, Sr. She has a deep passion for Indigenous languages and culture and aspires to be a Yugtun teacher in the YK Delta. Piiyuuk travels to communities across Alaska sharing her knowledge of language, culture, Yup'ik dance and traditional stories. She served as Miss Cama-i in 2016 and Miss World Eskimo-Indian Olympics (WEIO) in 2017. She is a 2013 FAI Summer Internship Program alum and was emcee of the 2016 FAI Elders & Youth Conference. Piiyuuk is currently a Legislative Aide in the office of **Representative Tiffany Zulkosky**, and will be participating in the Fellowship as a unique opportunity to support her work in the legislature.



Piiyuuk wears traditional regalia for the 2017 Miss WEIO competition. Photo by Sheila Vent

Martin Stepetin, Sr. is from St. Paul Island and lives in Juneau with his wife, Ann, and their four children. His parents are Carl and Pauline Stepetin. Martin completed the carpentry program at Alaska Job Corps in Palmer. He worked for Veco on the North Slope with the corrosion under insolation crew. Martin grew up halibut fishing every summer and eventually returned home to work as a deckhand on a fishing boat owned by his local Community Development Quota (CDQ) Company. After moving to Juneau in 2011, he started his family which opened his eyes to true responsibilities in life. Martin and Ann have supported each other and have found balance with family and work allowing them to raise their children at home. He is passionate about all issues surrounding Alaska Native peoples, civil rights and progressive politics. In the past few years, Martin has become politically active, advocating for his community at the city, state and federal levels. He participated in the 2018 Alaska Native Civic Engagement training with FAI's Alaska Native Policy Center. Martin will serve in the office of **Representative Dan Ortiz**.



Martin working as a loader operator. Photo by Martin Stepetin, Sr.

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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.