

First Alaskans Institute

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ANNOUNCING THE 2019 FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE ELDERS & YOUTH CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKERS AND AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

Anchorage, Alaska – Celebrate critical importance and diversity of our Alaska Native languages at the First Alaskans Institute 36th Annual Elders & Youth Conference (Elders & Youth). Our theme, “Qaneryararput Yugtun Piniqerput” (Yup’ik) and “Qaneryararput Cugtun Kayuqerput” (Cup’ik) loosely translates into English as “Language is Our Superpower.” To learn, live and speak our languages every day, a direct line to our Ancestors and the living personification of our beautiful lands of Alaska, brings us both backwards and forwards in time! As indigenous peoples alive today, we get to be part of the generation who keep the fires of our languages alive, and that makes us stronger. We proudly announce our keynote speakers who will speak to this theme.

Elder Keynote

Elder **Tugidam Ayagaa Sally Swetzof** (Unangax) was born and raised in a family of seven in Atka by her single mother, Clara Snigaroff. Her maternal grandparents were Andrew Snigaroff of Atka, an Iqyax (kayak) builder, and Mary (Prokopeuff) Snigaroff of Attu, a basket weaver. Her mother and grandparents lived through the tragedy and trauma of the evacuation and internment during World War II. Unangam Tunuu is her first language. She has overcome challenges of learning the English language in elementary school and going through the Bureau of Indian Affairs school system.



Tugidam Ayagaa with her grandson (above) and teaching how to butcher a seal (right). Photos by Crystal Dushkin.



Starting as an administrative aide, Tugidam Ayagaa worked her way up to the Unangam Tunuu language head teacher to all K-12 students at the Atka Netsvetov School. She is a founding member of Atxam Taligisniikangis (Atka Dancers), providing vital translations for many of the group’s original songs. In 2001, she began teaching sewing and beading of regalia and headdresses, and traditional food gathering and preparation, all while incorporating Unangam Tunuu. She is passionate about instilling in her children and grandchildren’s generations to be proud of who they are as Native people and to live and share our ways of life, including speaking our own languages.

In 2013, Tugidam Ayagaa was awarded the Shareholder of the Year Award by The Aleut Corporation and the Alaska Federation of Natives President’s Culture Bearer Award. She is a life-long Eastern Orthodox Christian and one of her greatest joys in life is serving the Church. Throughout the years, she has served on many boards and councils in Atka and in the Aleutian region, including as the Mayor of

the City of Atka (1997-1999). Tugidam Ayagaa now serves on the Atxam Corporation Board of Directors and is President of the Aleut International Association. She is a cultural consultant for the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA) Wellness Program and an Elder speaker mentor for the regional Language Revitalization program. She has contributed to the APIA Unangam Tunuu App, Atka dialect.

Youth Keynotes

Tusagvik Oliver Hoogendorn (Iñupiaq) and **Mungnak Wilson Hoogendorn** (Iñupiaq) were born and raised in Nome. Their parents are Brenna Outwater and Willy Hoogendorn. Their maternal grandparents are Martha Outwater and Richard Durham Jr. and paternal grandparents are Homer Hoogendorn and BJ Bains-Jordan. In May, the brothers climbed Denali, the highest mountain in North America. At first, they joked about doing the hike as their new challenge, but they kept talking about it and thought, “Why not?” At 20,310 feet above sea level, it took them 14 days to ascend Denali and a day and a half to ski down.



Tusagvik stands at the summit of Mount Osborn outside of Nome. Photo by James Horner.



Mungnak stands on top of Denali. Photo by Tusagvik.

Tusagvik is 22 years old, currently attending Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, soon to graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Biology. He enjoys backcountry skiing, running, carving ivory and making ulus. “My favorite part about being Iñupiaq is the land, plants and animals that live on that land. You can’t beat going for a long run on the tundra. I remember seeing a herd of caribou and eating blueberries. That’s what I think about when I think of my culture.” Tusagvik’s favorite food is boiled fish with seal oil, tukkaiyuk (willow greens) and black meat all in one bite. While he continues to find his own direction in life, he hopes to be someone his younger siblings and youth can look up to. He stands up for what he believes in and is not afraid to work through and learn from uncomfortable situations. He is willing to try new things even though it may not be what is expected of you. Climbing Denali taught him not everything has to be done fast or completed the first time.

Mungnak is 20 years old and is majoring in Aeronautical Studies to become a pilot at the University of Alaska Anchorage. His hobbies include skiing, running and carving ivory. He enjoys being active and breathing fresh air outside. In high school, Mungnak took part in cross country running and skiing, which led to ski biathlon and qualifying for the Arctic Winter Games in Greenland. He biked from Anchorage to Colorado on his own, which took 40 days. He values how accepting everyone is in his culture and believes it leads to harmonious living. Mungnak says, “I now know I can do whatever I want. I won’t let anything stop me. Seems simple, but once you realize it, it really helps you. Climbing Denali really solidified this for me.”

Additional Conference Highlights

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

Elders & Youth starts with a Warming of the Hands session on Sunday, October 13 at the Carlson Center in Fairbanks. The following three days, October 14-16, are filled with interactive, dynamic plenary speakers, hands-on Living & Loving Our Cultures workshops, and Community Engagement workshops covering relevant community issues. Men's, Women's and LGBTQA+2S Houses honor our peoples' ways of sharing through dialogue, creating healing spaces and by utilizing rites of passage knowledge.

Throughout Elders & Youth, there are cultural performances and an opportunity to showcase the talents of our participants, during our 8th Annual Chin'an: A Night of Cultural Celebration on Monday, October 14 from 7-10 pm at the Carlson Center. Tickets will be sold at registration and at the door for \$5.00 each with tickets waived for Elders. Chin'an is a public event and will feature performances by Diomedea Dancers, Di'haii Gwich'in Dancers, OPT-In Kiana, Q'oded Gilek Gidalyayh, Fairbanks Native Association Potlatch Dancers, and other special performances from Elders & Youth attendees. On Tuesday, October 15, a Teen Dance will be held for our registered participants and will be emceed by Ariel Tweto from Popping Bubbles, John Gourley and Zach Scott Carothers from Portugal. The Man., and Byron Nicholai from I Sing. You Dance.

Volunteering and Sponsoring

We could not put on Elders & Youth without the love and support of our community, volunteers and sponsors. Quyana cakneq for working with us in partnership to bring the most important people in our community together – our Elders and our youth! If you would like to volunteer for Elders & Youth please sign up online (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2019EYVolunteer>). If you would like to sponsor, visit our website (<https://firstalaskans.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-FAI-Elders-Youth-Conference.pdf>) for more information.

Broadcast and Webcast

Those who are not able to join us in person are invited to watch the statewide broadcast on Monday, October 14 and Tuesday, October 15 beginning at 8:30 am on GCI Channel 1, HD 907, ARCS, 360 North, and online at www.firstalaskans.org. Please note, on our final day, Wednesday, October 16, we will only be broadcasting on our website at www.firstalaskans.org.

Registration

Registration is available online (<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2019-statewide-elders-youth-conference-tickets-57059004017>) and onsite registration will begin 12-5 pm on Sunday, October 13 and at 7:30 am on Monday, October 14 at the Carlson Center. The registration fee is \$55.00 for youth, chaperones and other adult participants, while the fee is waived for Elders.

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About First Alaskans Institute (FAI): *At FAI 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 visit our website at www.firstalaskans.org, contact us at 907-677-1700 or email info@firstalaskans.org.*