

# ILANKA CULTURAL CENTER



WWW.ILANKACENTER.ORG

P.O. BOX 322 • 110 NICHOLOFF WAY • CORDOVA, ALASKA 99574 • (907) 424-7903

Ilanka Newsletter

Summer 2009

## Ilanka Cultural Center Needs Volunteers

Give a few hours of your spare time to help preserve and promote Native culture in Cordova! If you have a positive attitude and a bit of time to contribute, Ilanka needs you.

We depend on volunteers to conduct tours of the facility, teaching visitors about Native culture, history, and heritage. If public speaking isn't your strong point, consider helping document, label, and prepare artifacts for storage. We always need help filing, making copies and getting organized.

To volunteer, stop by Ilanka and talk with LaRue, Mary, or Anna. Or give us a call at 907-424-7903. We look forward to working with you!



## Making Mukluks

Students learn traditional techniques, historic practices with Willie Topkok

Willie Topkok was a recent guest instructor at Ilanka Cultural Center, where he taught a class on traditional mukluk construction. Over a four-day period, participants learned difficult skin sewing techniques to make authentic mukluks, but came away with a lot more than a sewing lesson. "Willie had many stories to share," said student Anna Pirtle. "We learned a lot more than just how to pull a needle through the hide." "I was embarrassed that I had to learn to sew," said Topkok. While he learned the tradition from his father,

sewing was typically a woman's activity. Now Topkok says he is excited to be able to pass along this traditional knowledge. Students used a variety of

materials to create their mukluks, and according to Pirtle, every pair was unique. Caribou hide with the hair on was used to create mukluks for outdoor winter



Anna Pirtle

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## Photographer illustrates challenges facing Native cultures

Ilanka Cultural Center recently exhibited the photo show, "Native Ways in Changing Times." The show, which ran from January 20th through May 31, 2009, featured the work of visual anthropologist Lisa Williams.

Williams uses her photography to explore the cultural, political, and environmental challenges facing the Native People of Port Graham and Nanwalek. Williams hopes that her photographs and the words of the people peak the viewer's interest, promotes understanding, and encourages the audience to step into another place of seeing and knowing.

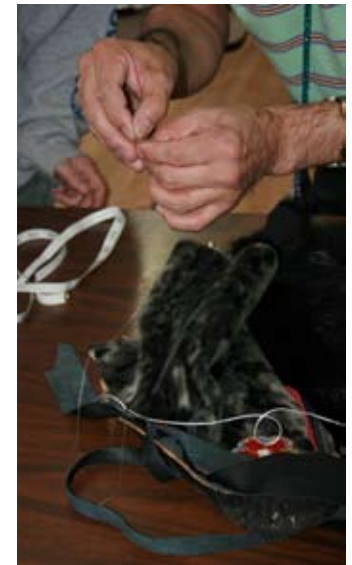
## Mukluk Artist Passes on Tradition (con't)

activities, such as hunting. The thick, dense caribou hair didn't leave much room for embellishments. Some students used seal skin or calf skin, which produced a more ornamental, yet still functional, boot. These styles could be enhanced with decorative stitching, brightly colored suede, and intricate beadwork. To attach the soles to the boot, students had to sew five layers of hide and fabric with a glovers needle. Traditionally, women chewed the soles to make them soft enough to sew, and Topkok encouraged the students to do so as well.

"We tried!" said Pirtle, "but it was so hard, it really hurt your teeth and jaws. Willie told us we would have to figure out our own alternative methods, so we tried different things like soaking the edges in hot water to soften them up."

According to Topkok, many of the older women who made mukluks in his village

have lost their teeth, and can't perform this strenuous work anymore. The younger generation isn't learning to make the traditional boots, he says, and fears the tradition could be lost. He encouraged his students, "Finish these mukluks, then start another pair. Keep making more!"



## Ilanka hosts Native fashion show

The Ilanka Cultural Center facilities transformed into a fashion runway on May 1, 2009, when more than 15 artists modeled traditional and contemporary Native fashions. Wearable art included fur parkas, kuspuks, seal skin mittens and vests, and mukluks. There was also a wide selection of jewelry made by Native artists from around the state.

The purpose of the fashion show was to increase community awareness of Native culture, and to help draw attention to the many talented artists living in Cordova. "The talent that people have is amazing," said Virginia Lacy. "There are so many capable people in this community. It is great to have a fashion show to show off their accomplishments." Virginia is a member of Ilanka's advisory board, and an artist herself.

Wearable art, such as the pieces featured to the right of this article, are available for sale in Ilanka's Gift Gallery, or online at [www.ilankastore.com](http://www.ilankastore.com)



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## TRIBAL COUNCIL

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Bruce Cain, Executive  
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LaRue Barnes, Museum  
Director  
Mary Babic, Consortium  
Director  
Anna Pirtle, Directors  
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## MISSION

Ilanka is a gathering place to celebrate and safeguard the prehistory and historical legacy of the indigenous peoples of the Native Village of Eyak, while exploring and promoting the diverse cultural present of our community.

We are here to educate our people, our community and our visitors, and to perpetuate the traditions, skills and material culture inherent in our lives as we face the challenges of today and the future.

# Repatriated Dugouts and Modern Bidarka Arrive in Cordova

After long dialogs and many visits between Chugach Alaska Corporation and the Ilanka Cultural Center, three Native watercraft have arrived in Cordova. John Johnson, Director of the CAC Cultural Department, first contacted LaRue Barnes, Director of Ilanka, in the summer of 2008. On behalf of CAC, Johnson offered two historic dugout canoes and a contemporary bidarka to the Ilanka Cultural Center Museum. The offer finally came to fruition in Spring of 2009, and the boats arrived in Cordova mid April. Ilanka is honored to have these important cultural pieces in its possession.

The two dugouts from Prince William Sound were repatriated through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act to Chugach Alaska Corp. Ilanka staff plan an exhibit that will tell the journey the dugouts have made, as well as the roles various institutions played to bring them home.

Mitch Poling constructed the large, three-hole bidarka frame at Nuciiq. It will be installed at the Masonic Hall July 29th. Poling will teach a class on bidarka construction on July 28, 2009. Bidarkas have a carved cedar prow with an intricately assembled and tied frame. Although typically covered with a

seal skin, this craft will be displayed without a hide. Anyone interested in the class should contact the cultural center.



*Left: Boats are unloaded at NVE offices. Top: LaRue Barnes and Lennette Ronnegard uncrate a repatriated canoe. Bottom: The prow from a historic bidarka.*

## Did you know...

Seal oil that is properly prepared and stored is sweet and has a clear consistency (or milky when frozen). Seal oil uses include: added as a flavor in Eskimo ice cream, fish dishes, and soups; used as a dip; and used as a trade item for other Native foods. "I don't feel full until I eat Native food, like a little seal oil at the end of a meal." –Elder



## SAVE 10% ONLINE

**Ilanka members save 10%** on all items (except books) when shopping on our online store. Email [info@ilankastore.com](mailto:info@ilankastore.com) to receive a promotional code.



# Raw Materials Cache Provides Artistic Opportunities

Do you need supplies for your traditional art projects? Thanks to a generous grant from the Administration for Native Americans, Ilanka has been operating a Raw Materials Cache for over a year. The cache includes items such as seal and sea otter pelts, as well as simple materials like gloves needles and wax thread.

"The cache has been a very popular addition to Ilanka," says Mary Babic, director of the Ilanka Native Artists Consortium, "especially when we offer classes. Artists get to choose from an array of materials that meet their budget." A beaver pelt, for example, is much more affordable than sea otter fur, but both can be made into beautiful mittens or mukluks. Some items, such as seal and otter, are limited to use by Alaska Natives only under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Another benefit of the Raw Materials Cache program is Ilanka's bartering system. "It's a great way for young or low-income artists to start up their own cottage industry," says Babic. "An artist can barter for enough materials to get started, then "pay back" the cache by either replenishing the raw materials, selling art on consignment, or paying in cash later on."

To take advantage of the bartering program at Ilanka, call Mary Babic or Anna Pirtle to obtain the application forms. You can also email Anna@nveyak.org.



## Shop Ilanka Online

Support Alaska Native artists! Shop online at [www.IlankaStore.com](http://www.IlankaStore.com), where you can purchase authentic Native art like this woven grass basket. Your purchase supports the artists and Ilanka Cultural Center programs.

## FEATURED ARTIST



**Peggy McDaniel**

Peggy is a Chugach Aleut artist. She has lived in Cordova for over 25 years and enjoys working in many different mediums. Using sea otter and seal pelts, Peggy creates an array of fur products, including headbands, mittens, baby booties, gloves, purses, and vests. She loves to embellish her pieces with beadwork. Peggy is committed to sharing her culture with others through her artwork. Order Peggy's art online at [www.IlankaCenter.org](http://www.IlankaCenter.org).

## Ilanka Cultural Center Memberships

**When you become a member of the Ilanka Cultural Center, you help:**

- provide a repository for Native artifacts
- preserve indigenous languages
- sponsor the Cordova Ikumat Alutiiq Dancers
- promote Native artisans and cottage industry
- maintain a tribal reference library
- conduct Native art & craft classes

**Yes! I would like to be a member of Ilanka Cultural Center.**

### Individual Memberships

- Currant Berry (Individual) \$20
- Salmon Berry (Family) \$50
- Ilanka Native Artists Consortium \$100
- Blue Berry (Patron) \$500
- Nagoon Berry (Benefactor) \$1,000

### Corporate Memberships

- Watermelon Berry \$100 - \$499
- Beach Strawberry \$500 - \$999
- Moss Berry \$1000 - \$4,999
- Lingon Berry \$5,000 - \$9,999
- Huckle Berry \$10,000 and above

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