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Coalition of 19 Eskimo villages fighting for tribal sovereignty

AKIACHAK, Alaska (AP) — Willie Kasayulie was 13 when he had to leave this Eskimo fishing village. It had no high school, and bright kids like Willie were sent to distant boarding schools.

Far from family and home, he polished his English, learned to deal with ignorance about his culture and realized the depth of his love for the land and his people.

At 37, Willie Kasayulie is back home, putting the lessons of his teen-age years to use. As chief of the Yupik Nation, he leads a coalition of 19 Yupik Eskimo villages in a battle with state and federal officials over control of the villages' destiny.

When Congress settled Alaska natives' land claims in 1971, it tried to avoid the social ills endured by American Indians in the lower 48 states. Instead of reservations run by tribal councils, it set up corporations run by native shareholders. But now Kasayulie and other native leaders, disappointed by the corporations' performance, say the tribal way looks better all the time.

Their efforts to assert tribal sovereignty are opposed by state and federal officials, who fear that recognition of distinct tribes in Alaska could split the state into an unmanageable hodgepodge of independent enclaves.

But Kasayulie, also a commercial fisherman, says that denying tribal status is denying a culture its right to govern itself by its traditions.

"They're trying to take away my cultural rights," said Kasayulie. "I don't want to forget who I am or where my roots are. We've got our language, our history, and those are as important as the history of the United States."

Akiachak, population 470, on the muddy Kuskokwim River in southwestern Alaska, can be reached only by boat or airplane in summer, by dog team or snowmobile in winter.

Despite its isolation, Akiachak is at the center of a movement among rural Alaska natives to assert tribal control over education, law enforcement, taxation, game regulations and other governmental functions.

The struggle is waged in legislative halls, courtrooms and the native villages themselves.

Akiachak residents voted in 1983 to replace their municipal government with a tribal council. The council now runs the village's water treatment plant, pays the salaries of three police officers and levies a 2 percent sales tax. A panel of elders metes out fines for minor crimes in the village. But the state recognizes neither council nor panel as legitimate governing bodies.

The Athabaskan Indian village of Copper Center announced its intention to tax the operators of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, which passes through traditional hunting grounds near the village. The case is pending in federal district court.

A non-native family expelled by Tyonek's tribal council sued the village. A federal district court upheld the village's sovereign immunity against such suits; an appeal is pending.

Congress thought it was heading off such conflicts when it passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971. Hailed as the most generous settlement ever struck with native Americans, the act granted Alaska's natives \$963 million and 44 million

acres in exchange for dropping aboriginal land claims.

The land and money were put under control of 12 regional corporations and 200 village corporations.

"Congress said in ANCSA, 'Look, the days of reservations are over. We want you to be good businessmen and be part of the American economic mainstream,'" said Thomas Morehouse, a researcher at the University of Alaska's Institute for Social and Economic Research.

The law's boosters said the corporations would make money for Alaska's 70,000 Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians, help develop the state's resources and assimilate natives into 11314900modern society, while addressing social problems such as alcoholism and suicide.

Children compete in Deaf Olympics

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The Mini Deaf Olympics has done more for 16-year-old Michael Coomer of Louisville than simply give him a chance to compete in athletic events.

"He's very excited about it every year," his mother, Norma said. "You can see a change in him when he comes back from this . . . It seems like he's more satisfied with the rest of the summer."

Olympic organizer Timothy "Timo" Owens would probably be happy with that result. It's one of the things he wanted to achieve when he sat down with six others in 1983 and tried to figure out how to give deaf and hearing-impaired children something to do in the summertime.

"Summer is the most boring season for the deaf," said Owens, 32, who is deaf. "I know because I went through this myself."

Carolyn Clark, co-director of publicity for the sixth annual Olympics, held in July at the Kentucky School for the Blind, agrees.

"In the summer, there's really nothing. They feel isolated. They have no one to play with in the neighborhoods," Clark said.

Owens said this year's event had 112 participants from five states — Kentucky, Indiana, North Carolina, Michigan and Tennessee.

Some of the youths, who ranged in age from 7-18, were completely deaf. Others were hearing-impaired. Some could read lips and speak clearly, some used a phonetic approach to speech, some used a combination of lip-reading, speech and sign language.

But each year, Owens said, the participants come away with the same message — that the Deaf Olympics is something which is separate from the hearing world. It's something they can call their own.

The youths spent four days playing volleyball, basketball, table tennis, badminton and participating in track-and-field events. They also swam, bowled and roller-skated.

Awards were given each day and

gold medals awarded on the final day of competition.

"It's a lot of fun," said Michael Hesse, 17, a senior-to-be at Louisville Trinity High School. "You get to compete, and you actually get to go for the gold medal," he said with a laugh.

The Olympics, however, isn't just daytime sports competition. It's also nighttime social activities.

This year, the youths went on a Belle of Louisville evening cruise, danced the night away at a dressy teen disco, got in the mud for double dare and slid down an artificial water slide.

Owens said some youths want to return each year for the social events alone, but all have to participate in the athletic activities.

The youths' athletic ability is less-than-average, he said, but "they never think about it."

The sports competition "challenges them to explore their possibilities. . . . It also helps them to know it doesn't hurt to try," Owens said.

Clark said deaf and hearing-impaired children do not have much of an opportunity to participate in sports in school, especially at the varsity level.

Getting the chance to join in sporting events teaches the youths leadership and teamwork, she said, adding that these are skills hearing children learn every day.

Owens said this year's Olympics budget was \$12,000, but he expected the total cost to run about \$2,000 over that amount. Participants paid \$25, which included their food and lodging.

Clark said, organizers would like Louisville to be the site of a national Deaf Olympics, culminating a series of mini-events in all 50 states.

To reach that goal, Owens has quit his teaching job and will live off his savings, he said. Work, he said, prevented him from being able to seek grants and sponsorships.

Clark said, "We don't have the time to go and talk to people during the day." All the money is given out early in the year, and "we're not working," she said.

75-year-old takes job with congress

LEVITTOWN, Pa. (AP) — Some people might think it unusual that a 75-year-old man would take a congressional internship simply to learn more about the government.

But Jerzy Patejak, of Wampum, Pa., who is serving an internship this summer with Rep. Joe Kolter, D-Pa., thinks the unusual people are those of any age who do not take an active interest in politics.

"How could you not be involved in politics?" asked Patejak, a retired design engineer.

"How could you be unaware of what is going on? After all, every day somebody makes a decision which affects you. Our freedom, our very existence depends on the government."

Patejak's interest in politics dates back to his youth in Poland.

He studied engineering at Warsaw Technical Institute and law at Warsaw University, and fought against an invading Germany in 1939.

Patejak spent the next six years in German prisoner-of-war and labor camps.

He was liberated by Allied armies in 1945, but instead of returning to Poland, which had been liberated by Russia, he traveled to England to continue his engineering studies.

In 1951, he moved to the United States.

He has written more than a dozen "Sound-Off" columns for the Bucks County Courier Times on topics ranging from the steel industry to

education to the Iran-Contra scandal.

The internship with Kolter is an opportunity for Patejak to actively pursue his interest in politics and see the government from a fresh perspective at the same time, he said.

"All of the information I've ever received about the government has been from the press or from the politicians themselves," he said. "This is my chance to see how it works from the inside."

The idea of taking on the internship first came to Patejak a year ago while having a discussion with an assistant of Kolter.

When the assistant saw that Patejak was genuinely interested in the workings of the government, he suggested a congressional internship.

"I didn't know and probably a lot of people don't know that such things exist, but I thought I would give it a try," he said.

Patejak called Kolter's office and asked for an interview to discuss the possibility of an internship.

He didn't think that his age should be a factor in whether he was given the internship position or not.

Kolter agreed that his age should not be taken into consideration.

Patejak sees his purpose as being an independent observer of Kolter, who serves on the aviation subcommittee of the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation.

Kolter is currently seeking a fourth term in the House.

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