



# Alutiiq Museum Bulletin

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## Weavers Chosen for Trip to St. Petersburg

At the October 2009 meeting of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Alutiiq Museum Executive Director Sven Haakanson, Jr. sat next to a weaver. The woman was listening to the conference speakers, but her eyes and agile hands were intently focused on the base of a raffia basket. Intrigued, Haakanson watched quietly, absorbing the woman's keen interest in her weaving before introducing himself. To his delight, the woman turned out to be Elizabeth Peterson, a former Akhiok resident and one of five Alutiiq artists recently selected to study ancestral basketry in Russia. Inspired by the upcoming trip, Elizabeth was weaving at every opportunity.

In January 2010, Haakanson will escort Peterson and four other weavers – Melissa Berns, Coral Chernoff, Vickie Era, and June Simeonoff Pardue - to St. Petersburg, a city known for its museums. The artists will view woven objects made by their ancestors now stored in two museums, both with collections from the Russian colonization of Alaska.

According to Haakanson, "Many of the objects collected by the Russian traders and naturalists we've come to know through historic accounts – Sarychev, Lisianskii, and Voznesenskii, and others - are cared for in St. Petersburg. The city's museums hold hundreds of old, beautifully preserved items from Native Alaska, and many of the pieces have never been studied."

The Alutiiq Museum selected the five artists through a competitive application process that stressed both knowledge of weaving and experience sharing the art. Each submitted a cover letter, a resume, and photographs of their work for review. The top ranked candidates are now headed to Russia and the chance of a lifetime - five days examining the works of skilled nineteenth century ancestors. A generous donation from

Koniag, Inc. will support their travel. In return for this opportunity, each artist will make a basket for the museum's permanent collection and participate in teaching weaving through an Alutiiq Museum program. Teri Rofkar, a celebrated Tlingit weaver, will pay for her own participation, accompanying the team and sharing the experience with a representative of a neighboring Alaska Native culture.

The St. Petersburg's trip is an extension of the Museum's Sugpiaq Collection of The Kunstkamera project. With funding from the National Park Service Shared Beringian Heritage Program, Haakanson has been leading efforts to photograph about 500 Alutiiq objects in the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography – also known as the Kunstkamera. The images will be united with object information and anthropological essays to create a published catalog of the Kunstkamera's Alutiiq collections, as well as an archive of information for use by the Alutiiq Museum.

The success of the catalog project encouraged Haakanson to include artists in the final trip to St. Petersburg. "Our Russian colleagues have done a tremendous job documenting Alutiiq objects for us. We are grateful for their support and look forward to sharing the insights of our artists. We want to give the Kunstkamera as much information as we can, to help them understand and interpret their Alutiiq collections and show our appreciation for the great care they continue to provide our ancestors' artifacts. I see this project as the first steps in many years of positive collaboration."

*The Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology & Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia on the bank of the Neva River.*

