

Locals Heading to Helsinki to Examine Alutiiq Sewing

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Staff and volunteers at the Alutiiq Museum will travel abroad in January to learn the fine art of skin and fur stitching. The museum recently received a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to send Museum Director Sven Haakanson and five local skin sewers to Helsinki, Finland. Haakanson joined master sewer Susan Malutin and Museum Manager Katie St. John on KMXT's Talk of the Rock on Tuesday to discuss the new grant and other happenings at the museum.

While Finland may seem like a far trek to learn about Alutiiq sewing techniques, Haakanson said it's actually a remarkable opportunity to examine items in Helsinki's museum.

-- (Sewing Skin Grant 1 :32 “Well the wonderful thing with Finland is they've invited us over to examine the collection. They have the second largest collection of Alutiiq material in the world. The first largest is in Russia. And so they have I think ground squirrel, cormorant, eider, caribou and hopefully we might find some other things that we haven't really paid attention to while we're there in terms of the skin sewing. But I think for us the importance is having access to an original piece where we can study it and then learn that technique.”)

Malutin, who has been studying the art of skin sewing for about 30 years, said the information that they gather in Finland will help with a collaborative project to recreate a traditional Alutiiq parka. The parka project is a partnership between the museum and Koniag, Inc. Malutin said she and other sewers who visit Finland will travel to the villages to help construct portions of the parka that will eventually be sewn together with the sewing techniques they learn in Helsinki.

-- (Sewing Skin Grant 2 : 31 “And each of the village participants, mostly the youth, will be making a piece of that parka. And we'll also be indoctrinating them into the techniques of sewing, how the items are made, what resources are used, and then those pieces will ultimately come back here to Kodiak, which we will be utilizing in a sewing circle. And we'll have those individuals will meet once a week and complete the parka so that will be a complete garment when we get done.”)

When finished, the parka will be on display at the Alutiiq Museum in Kodiak. Malutin said the trip to Finland is a chance to learn skin sewing skills that have been lost through the generations on Kodiak.

-- (Sewing Skin Grant 3 : 32 "And it really has helped to travel to other areas, particularly museums that have these items of clothing because as I began many years ago there weren't any skin sewers here, especially elders who remembered doing the skin sewing. So it was very hard to try and find those techniques. And as I traveled it allowed me the chance to meet other elder ladies who sewed and so I picked up techniques from them. And so it's going to be extremely interesting to see original pieces and how they are originally put together. ")

The Institute of Museum and Library Services grant was just shy of \$50,000 and will be put toward the parka recreation project. The museum will select additional sewers for the trip to Finland during a competitive application process this fall.

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