Alutiiq Museum to Spotlight Traditional Weaving

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

A new exhibit is coming to the Alutiiq Museum, one that will focus on weaving traditions. Museum Manager Katie St. John said woven objects were found everywhere in Alutiiq culture, especially in homes.

“Because they were sleeping mats, they separated different parts of the area from other parts, they were used to hold food, they were used as socks within shoes. So they were just used in a huge variety of ways.”

St. John said the exhibit was inspired by a trip former museum director Sven Haakanson took several years ago. He and a group of weavers went to St. Petersburg, Russia, to look at woven collections at two museums.

“And they were inspired and came back to Kodiak, created objects, went out to villages and to share the knowledge that they gained over there and we are going to kind of coalesce all of that information into an exhibit and booklet that has been funded by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.”

The booklet will feature information and photographs about traditional weaving, and provide some simplified images of how to tie some of the knots.

“It will share some of the stories of the weavers and their experiences in St. Petersburg, and in the villages, sharing this information. Hopefully it will really give a rounded idea of the use of woven objects, and some of the story, as well.”

St. John said Kodiak is unique in its weaving history, mainly because the archipelago provides a diversity of materials.

“On the Aleutian Islands, they generally use grass and then down in Southeast of Alaska they generally use spruce root. And so we are at this meeting place between those two techniques and so we have an even richer use of materials around here because of that.”

The exhibit and booklet are funded through a $35,000 grant from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, a Seattle-based organization that supports non-profits in the Pacific Northwest. St. John said the foundation was the one to approach the museum, and asked if it needed any projects funded.

“They did, yeah. They are
looking to expand their support in Alaska and we had worked with them in
the past, I believe it was in 2008, when they funded the production of
the Generations cd that we made here locally, so they just came back to
us.”

Work on the exhibit will begin this fall, but it is not expected to open until May.