

President's Everyday Hero Award
Culture Bearer

Kaanak
RUTH DEMMERT



Ruth was raised in Kake by her grandparents Johnny and Fannie Wilson. Her Tlingit name is *Kaanak* and she is *Kaach.ádi*. She attended Sheldon Jackson in Sitka, and is a cultural leader and teacher. She was born into the Lingit language. The language, stories, songs, and *Keex' Kwaan* dance style were taught to her by her grandfather, Johnny C. Jackson, and other Kake elders.

Ruth has distinguished herself as an exemplary citizen of the State of Alaska through her many years of dedicated service to tribal citizens and the community of Kake. She's worked with Sealaska Heritage Institute and Goldbelt Heritage on curriculum development and has enriched the lives of many people through teaching ancient traditional Tlingit songs and dances, proper drumming techniques, and how to make traditional Tlingit regalia. She was the first to collaborate with the State on developing a Lingit place names project which she had collected all her life and eventually was written by Dr. Thomas Thorton as part of his dissertation. Ruth has served as a Central Council Delegate, SHI Board of Trustee, SHI's Council of Traditional Scholars, and as a coordinator and teacher for the Organized Village of Kake's (OVK) Culture Camp. She has been the *Keex' Kwaan* dance group leader since 1974 and is a lifetime member of the ANS Camp 10. She is also a member of the Kake Coalition, which is an advisory board for OVK's Domestic Violence program, Circle Peacemaking Tribal Court, Kake's Culture Camp, and SEARHC's Wellness program.

OVK has recognized Ruth as a *Keex' Kwaan* Cultural Treasure for her vast knowledge of the Lingit language and spelling, speaking the *Keex' Kwaan* dialect, knowledge of the *Keex' Kwaan* clan houses and history, her continued mentoring of youth, and community volunteerism.