



CENTRAL COUNCIL

Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tribe Seeks Funds For Cultural, Educational, Tourism Center

*Native Culture Center Project Offers Opportunities for Region-wide Collaboration,
Promises New Jobs for Rural Communities in Southeast Alaska*

In January 2010, Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska President William E. Martin, accompanied by managers and legal counselors, met with the Alaska Delegation in Washington DC to promote a project aimed at creating jobs in smaller communities, and preserving Native cultures.

Central Council is seeking federal seed funds for the new Southeast Alaska Native Cultural, Educational, and Tourism Center to be located in Juneau, Alaska. The Culture Center will offer a cultural experience for Juneau visitors where they will learn about Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures and traditions. The Culture Center will also feature interactive exhibits, storytelling, traditional-style all natural foods, a theater, a shopping mall, and several distance learning labs as part of the Council's Tribal College program.

"We were very excited and proud to present this project to our Alaska Delegation. It has been a group effort and we are thankful for everyone's hard work. We have been working on this project for quite some time," said President Martin. "Our meetings with the Alaska Delegation have been a success, the time is right to move forward, it's time to make it happen."

While the Native unemployment rate is around 35% in Juneau, the unemployment rate among Natives reaches 90% in smaller communities like Hydaburg and Angoon. The Culture Center will create and support jobs in smaller communities by marketing and selling goods and services produced in rural Southeast Alaska. The Culture Center will "connect" rural businesses to over one million potential customers that visit Juneau annually.

"Many of our tribal members live in smaller communities, where economic opportunities are limited and there is little tourism. However, our people have many ideas and talents to share with the world, be it fishing, hunting or eco-tours; natural foods; beauty products; arts and crafts; or even high-quality apparel—we see businesses like these in many villages. However, like other fledgling entrepreneurs, our people need support and access to markets so they can sell their products and services and make a living. Through the Culture Center they will have access to the largest cruise ship tourism market in Alaska. For a small business in a rural area, having an opportunity to market their products to over one million people every year will be a tremendous opportunity," stated President Martin.

In addition to creating jobs, the Culture Center will offer:

- *Expanded opportunities for tourism-based businesses in Juneau:* Once constructed, the Culture Center will enrich the cultural content in Juneau to justify longer stays for cruise ships, giving more opportunities for businesses in Juneau and the region to achieve higher revenues.
- *More tourism for Southeast Alaska:* Having a visitors bureau at the Culture Center with a focus on village-based guides and lodge operators will encourage tourists to come back as independent travelers to explore rural Southeast, and support rural economies.
- *Protection of Native cultures:* The project will sustain hundreds of artists, businesses, craftspeople, and performers from throughout Southeast Alaska; will provide resources to rural communities with which they can engage in cultural activities; and will provide internships and scholarships for younger tribal members to promote cultural knowledge and college education.

The operation of the facility will create and maintain many new direct jobs in Juneau and many more indirect jobs in rural communities throughout the region. The construction phase will create an estimated 160 local jobs. Tlingit-Haida Regional Housing Authority (THRHA) is an avid supporter and an active advocate of the project. "I believe in partnerships," said THRHA President Dr. Blake Kazama. "Together, we are afforded an opportunity to build upon a synergistic effect. This exciting project would become a monument not only to the tribes of Southeast, but to all who visit the capital city of Alaska. As a housing authority, we have the expertise to put the project together, and we have a core crew that would hire locally. We [will] support the project with grants. We are proud to be a partner."

If the request is successful, Central Council will acquire a beautiful, presently vacant site in the heart of downtown Juneau for the Culture Center. Having a dedicated site for the Culture Center will energize the Native community in the region, foster collaboration, and most importantly, open up opportunities to pursue federal and state grants and private contributions for subsequent stages of the project.

When completed the Culture Center will function like a business enterprise and will not require government subsidies. Central Council examined two potential models when considering this project—the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii and the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center in Fairbanks were deemed highly relevant, and representatives of each of these facilities have been identified as prospective mentors. Both facilities are financially solid and gaining market share.

Central Council has the support of a growing number of federally-recognized Indian tribes, Native and non-Native organizations, traditional artists, and small and big businesses in Southeast Alaska: Craig Community Association, Tlingit- Haida Regional Housing Authority, Douglas Indian Association, Hydaburg Cooperative Association, Organized Village of Kasaan, Ketchikan Indian Corporation, Klawock Cooperative Association, Petersburg Indian Association, Organized Village of Saxman; and also, Ravenstail Weavers' Guild, Jeanie Greene Productions,

McDowell Group, All Nations' Children, Xaadas Gita'lang of Juneau, BBC Human Resource Development Corporation, University of Alaska Southeast, to name a few, and hundreds of Native artists from around the region. New resolutions and letters of support are coming in daily.

"We are pleased to have been able to generate so much public support for this initiative," said President Martin. "Our representatives in Washington DC were very pleased to see this level of support. We look forward to seeing more organizations support the project, such as Sealaska—our regional partner—with whom we have a historic Memorandum of Understanding to work collaboratively together. Having Sealaska as a partner will send a strong message to all funding agencies, tribes, and corporations around the state."

"In times like this, when resources are limited, we must communicate to our representatives in Washington DC with one voice, as one region, that we need the Southeast Alaska Culture Center," said President Martin. "If all Native organizations join forces behind this project, our people will have a Culture Center in Juneau."

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