



CENTRAL COUNCIL

Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

320 W. Willoughby Ave., Suite 300 ▪ Juneau, AK ▪ 99801
907.586.1432 ▪ Fax: 907.586.8970 www.ccthita.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Central Council Advances Plan for a Southeast Alaska Native Culture Center

On Sunday, March 21, the Executive Committee of the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Central Council), by unanimous vote, authorized the organization's president, Bill Martin, to make an offer of purchase to the owners of the property in downtown Juneau, often referred to as the "burn hole." One of Juneau's oldest commercial buildings was destroyed by fire there in August 2004. The site is now an empty lot—the exposed foundation well below street level.

The preliminary plan combines a culture center and a tribal college. The street accessible floor of the culture center will provide space for food service, stores that will present authentic Alaska Native-made products to Juneau visitors, and displays that will feature Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian art. The upper floors will include a small theater, a tribal college center for distance learning, and student housing.

While the plans are at the conceptual stage, President Martin welcomes ideas and suggestions from tribal members and the public on what they want to see in a culture center and tribal college.

Upon completing the purchase, the next step, according to President Martin, will be to fill in the hole to eliminate possible liabilities and to make the site a place of beauty rather than the eyesore it is today.

Martin says he intends to engage in intensive collaboration with other Southeast Alaska Native organizations.

"We will also reach out to Juneau business leaders and tourism industry representatives to share with them our vision and to enlist their support," stated President Martin. "This project will help revitalize the core of downtown and enrich the cultural content of Alaska's capital city."

The economic benefits of this project are expected to extend well beyond the construction phase and the boundaries of Juneau. The center will serve as an outlet for authentic Alaska Native-made products like natural skin care lotions and balms, garments, and Native art; products that are currently created or manufactured in rural Alaska Native communities but do not have reliable outlets. Dozens of direct jobs will be created to staff the center, and many indirect jobs as a result of increased interest in Native products, are expected to be created in communities throughout the region.

"The tribal college will be a collaboration with other universities and will feature the latest in distance learning technologies," Martin states. "We have already secured a half million dollars in funding for tribal college curriculum development." Martin has signed memorandums of agreement with key institutions. He expects that funding sources will become available as the project moves forward.

"We hope this Alaska Native Culture Center will be a spark," says President Martin, "that brings to life a healthy focus on the Native people and cultures of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian people of Southeast Alaska."

Please send your ideas and suggestions for the culture center and tribal college to Ashli Colón at acolon@ccthita.org with "Suggestions for the T&H Cultural Center" in the subject line.

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Contacts:

Bill Martin, President

Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

320 W. Willoughby Ave., Suite 300, Juneau AK 99801

Phone: 907.463.7103 | Toll Free: 1.800.344.1432 ext. 7103

Email: bmartin@ccthita.org

Carlton Smith

Phone: 907.463.4800

Email: carlton@thecarltonsmithcompany.com

Exterior and interior elevations of the proposed center:

