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FILM PROJECT AWARDED RASMUSON FOUNDATION GRANT
Games of the North Highlights Arctic Indigenous Sports

The Alaska Native Heritage Center received a \$168,700 grant from the Rasmuson Foundation to help complete "Games of the North," a film series about the cultural, geographic and athletic components of the indigenous sports of the Arctic.

The project involves a feature-length theatrical release along with a one-hour primetime broadcast on PBS in March, 2009.

"Because it's slated for PBS, it's going to present different aspects of Alaska Native cultures to a national audience," said Steven Alvarez, director of cultural education and strategic initiatives at the Heritage Center. "It will show Alaska Natives in a traditional way, how they walk in both worlds, through the excitement of competitive athletics."

An educational toolbox will complement the documentary with an instructional book, equipment for doing the games, multi-media elements like podcasts and curriculum that reaches a broad audience. Starseed Media of Seattle is producing the Games of the North project with the association of the Heritage Center.

Jonathon Stanton, director of the project and founder of Starseed Media, began filming the "Games" in 2003, traveling from rural Alaska to the Ivy League to produce 175 hours of stunning high definition video.

The resulting feature film tells the story of four Alaskan Inuit athletes as they compete in the indigenous sports of the Arctic during a time of unprecedented global change. The games prove as crucial to them as to their ancestors.

"The film is more than about the games themselves," said Stanton. "It's a modern story about landscape, wildlife, Alaska Native peoples today. It's a broad look at Arctic life and underneath everything is the value system."

A fusion of traditional Alaska Native music, hip-hop and music by the award-winning band Pamyua resonates through the film, symbolizing the generations of incredible dancers and athletes honoring their past while embracing the future of the games. One of Pamyua's founders, Phillip Blanchett, is an associate producer of the film and a instrumental culture bearer for the project, said Stanton.

The philanthropic Rasmuson Foundation invests in individuals and nonprofit groups in fields like health, social services, and arts and culture. "We support nonprofits and their good work," said program officer Helen Howarth. "The impact of the grant money is about the vision of the organization."

A launch party for the feature film and PBS documentary will take place in New York City at 7 p.m. October 16 at the Alaska House New York, 109 Mercer Street in SoHo. The event includes highlight reels, live entertainment, a sampling of Alaskan seafood and other products, and an auction to benefit the Alaska House (www.alaskahouseny.org).

For information about "Games of the North," contact Carolyn Kinneen, vice president of programming and development for Starseed Media, at carolyn@starseedmedia.com or (907) 227-8422. View clips, read biographies and find other information at www.gamesofthenorth.com.