

BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION

# OUR STORY 50

YEARS OF  
SERVICE



# OUR STORY **50** YEARS OF SERVICE

**50 years ago** in 1966, a conversation began in the homes and communities of Bristol Bay. Though the people in these communities represented one of the most diverse populations in Alaska – encompassing three major Alaska Native ethnicities (Yup'ik Eskimo, Aleutian/Alutiiq and Athabascan Indian) as well as Russian, Japanese, and European immigrants – they were unified by their shared connection to the lands and waters of the Bristol Bay region. Our elders knew that statehood and the arrival of the Western culture threatened that connection, so they started talking. That conversation was the beginning of the Bristol Bay Native Association.

This is the story of those first 50 years of service. It's the story of how our elders came together, how they gave of themselves freely to secure a future for their people. We are blessed to have many of our elders still here today to tell their story, and to share the memories of those who have passed on. To commemorate these first 50 years, we gathered as many of these stories as we could. Though we could never tell each individual's story here, in an important way the history of the Native Association is the history of all of us.

For our 50th Anniversary, we want to tell the story so far, and to honor the elders that worked so hard for our future. It's a story of change, and of adapting to serve the changing needs of our people and our region. It's a story of sacrifice, but also one of the incredible success born out of our unity and perseverance. It's a story we must continue to tell for each new generation, because it's as much about where we're going as about where we've been. *It's our story.*



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# OUR CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES

TODAY, THE NATIVE ASSOCIATION SERVES **31 COMMUNITIES** ACROSS A 40 MILLION ACRE TRACT OF SOUTHWEST ALASKA.

**Each of the three major Alaska Native ethnicities** is represented, comprising the majority of the region's population – as much as 70% in some areas. The region is remote and only accessible by air or water, making fuel and manufactured goods very expensive. In some areas, almost a quarter of residents live below the poverty line, making subsistence activities a necessity as well as a cultural tradition. The major Native cultures in the region are the Yup'ik Eskimos, Dena'ina Athabascans, and the Aleut/Aluutiq. Though the distinctions between these ethnicities have blurred somewhat as their customs merged with one another and with the modern influences of outsiders, we still place great value on our cultural heritage. Native dialects and traditional practices like subsistence activities and steam houses continue to be an important connection to our ancestors and our land.

## Eskimo

The original inhabitants of the coastal areas along Bristol Bay itself, the Yup'ik Eskimos were primarily hunters of large mammals such as moose, caribou and bear. They supplemented those food sources with ptarmigan and waterfowl, and of course harvested salmon with gill nets fashioned from spruce roots.

## Aleut

The Aluutiq or Aleuts were skilled boat wrights and navigators, known for constructing the covered canoes known as kayaks or bidarkas as well as larger open-topped craft called angyat or baidar. They used these boats to "surf" between islands and the mainland, as well as for harvesting salmon, halibut, and many types of sea mammals.

## Indians

The Dena'ina Athabascans were originally an inland culture primarily settled in the Lake Clark and Iliamna region. They harvested the area's abundant red salmon runs, as well as moose and caribou, and have a rich oral history with many parables that feature the Raven – their Creator – as a central figure for the transmission of their traditional beliefs.



# THE BIRTH OF THE BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION

**Despite the vast natural resources provided** by our land, life in the villages was very challenging for our people before our elders came together to form BBNA. Homes were small, overcrowded, and most basic utilities were unavailable. Schools were virtually nonexistent, and hospitals and other health care were extremely expensive and often very far away from individual villages. The boats our elders fished from were very old – good enough for subsistence fishing, perhaps, but not to compete with the commercial fishing boats supplying the canneries. When access to subsistence resources became threatened by the land claims struggles, our elders knew they had to organize and act today for a better tomorrow.

The first major Native organizations in the area, such as the South Central Alaska Native Association (SCANA – which would later become BBNA) and the Western Alaska Cooperative Market Association (WACMA) primarily handled fishing-related issues. Our people needed modern fishing boats and equipment to gain access to the commercial fishing industry, so SCANA sought out funding sources to provide affordable loans to outfit our fishermen. Meanwhile WACMA worked to negotiate fair prices for our fish with the canneries.

So we can see that by the 1950s and 1960s our elders were actively organizing to meet the most fundamental need for our people at that time: food and jobs provided by commercial fishing. The fact that many of our elders were themselves commercial fishermen – that is, businessmen – meant that they also possessed an entrepreneurial spirit. Their willingness to organize combined with that entrepreneurial spirit would serve our elders, indeed all of us, very well when in 1971 ANCSA provided for our people's entry into the modern corporate economy.

**DESPITE THE VAST NATURAL RESOURCES PROVIDED BY OUR LAND, LIFE IN THE VILLAGES WAS VERY CHALLENGING FOR OUR PEOPLE BEFORE OUR ELDERS CAME TOGETHER TO FORM BBNA.**



# ANCSA AND THE BIRTH OF THE "BBs"

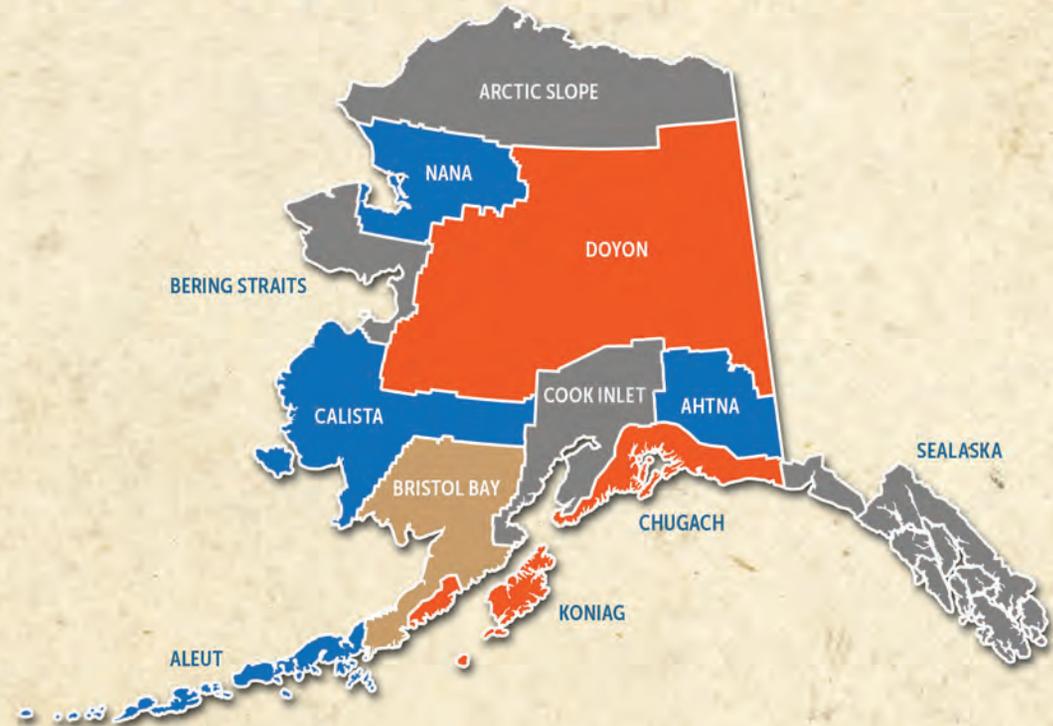
THE NATIVE LAND CLAIMS SECURED OUR FUTURE BY ENSURING OUR CONTINUED CONNECTION TO THE LANDS AND WATERS OF THE BRISTOL BAY REGION.

**ANCSA** - With commercial fishing already a major component in the regional economy by the time of the land use struggles, Bristol Bay Natives had already been organizing to secure fair prices for our fishermen and to address similar fishing-related issues. For our elders, it was a natural outgrowth of these efforts to pursue formal recognition of the Native struggle for economic security and social justice. Their tireless efforts were rewarded in 1971, five years after our conversation began, when President Richard M Nixon signed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) into law. With the passage of ANCSA, our elders settled the Native Land Claims and secured our future by ensuring our continued connection to the lands and waters of the Bristol Bay region.

**Birth of the BBs** - The passage of ANCSA also set the stage for our people's participation in the modern economy. Though BBNA would not be formally incorporated itself until 1973, the need for a for-profit corporation to manage lands and revenues generated under ANCSA brought about the birth of the second of the "BBs" – the Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC). BBNC was one of the 12 original regional Native Corporations to receive subsurface rights to more than 40 million acres across the state, with the surface rights going to village corporations in a split estate. The village corporations in the Bristol Bay region were ceded 3 million acres of land carefully selected to maximize access to natural resources for economic growth, as well as traditional and subsistence uses. As stockholders in the newly formed corporations, Native families were now able to engage in corporate capitalism and earn an income while remaining in our villages and maintaining traditional lifestyles.

**Self-Determination** - The formation of BBNC allowed BBNA to pivot its focus to providing social services, health care and education by compacting with the federal government and applying for grant funding. These services were historically delivered by state and federal agencies with no understanding of our region, our cultures, or our people. In addition to Head Start and technical job training programs, BBNA worked to ensure tribal self-determination in the administration of these social services, and formally incorporated as a non-profit in 1973 – the same year as the third of the BBs, the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation (BBAHC). Then, in 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act opened the door for federally recognized tribal organizations to enter into compacts with and receive grants directly from government agencies. This established the government-to-government relationship between our tribal councils and the federal government and formally recognized our right to self-determination and self-governance.

# ANCSA CREATED 13 REGIONAL CORPORATIONS AND MORE THAN 200 VILLAGE CORPORATIONS.



## BBNA FACTS

- ▶ The Head Start program has now been extended to four communities: Dillingham, Manokotak, New Stuyahok and Togiak.
- ▶ Job training and placement continue to be an important part of the Association's work, but we've expanded our services to include Land Management, Indian Child Welfare, Natural Resources, Economic and Workforce Development, Vocational Rehabilitation, Higher Education, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Village Public Safety Officer Program (VPSO) and Tribal Energy Programs.
- ▶ Collectively, BBNA and other tribal organizations are the region's largest employer and fastest growing segment of the Bristol Bay regional economy.

# GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP

In order to fully appreciate our elders' accomplishments, we have to consider what it means to own land, and to be a nation. For our purposes, these abstract legalistic concepts are best understood in terms of sovereignty – the authority of a people to govern itself.

Our right to govern ourselves and our land flows from an inherent sovereignty that predates the very existence of the United States, or even the arrival of the Western culture in the Bristol Bay region. The relationship between our people and the United States is a trust relationship between a dominant national sovereign and domestic dependent nation. These principles have been confirmed by judicial decisions, treaties, Acts of Congress (most notably ANCSA and ISDEA), and administrative practice for more than 150 years. In this way we can see that the relationship of Alaska Native villages to the federal government is rightly defined as a government-to-government relationship. This relationship is our elders' greatest achievement and the most important part of the Native Association's work today.

Compacting is the process that structures the government-to-government relationship. It refers to the formation of contracts between the Native Association or Village Councils and the agencies of the US federal government. These contracts provide for the funding of social services – services that are typically delivered by state and federal agencies. Thanks to compacting, we are able to determine for ourselves the best way to meet the needs of our people as opposed to relying on distant agencies with limited understanding of our region or culture. A compact is a solemn covenant between sovereigns, typically used in international affairs and diplomacy, and so can be understood as the formal recognition of our right to self-determination.

If this all seems very complicated, imagine what our elders' must have felt like! Many of them were fishermen with perhaps only a high school education, but they immersed themselves in constitutional law and the congressional process. They were already leaders in their communities but they became something greater yet: they became statesmen. As the leaders of our nation, they engaged with the leaders of the United States to guarantee our sovereignty.

## THEY MADE SURE THAT THE STORY OF BRISTOL BAY WOULD ALWAYS BE OUR STORY.



# BBNA AND THE "BBs" TODAY



## Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA)

Though not the first of the "BBs" to be incorporated, BBNA is the parent organization that established the "partner BBs" as the needs of our people and our region changed. Today, BBNA is a non-profit dedicated to serving the Tribes and Native peoples of Bristol Bay by delivering social services and a unified voice for our region – the same unity that made our elders successful. We are proudly led by a full board from our 31 tribes and made up entirely of Alaska Natives.



## Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC)

BBNC is the for-profit Native Corporation created to manage the funds and subsurface rights to the lands ceded to the Alaska Native Tribes under ANCSA, thereby ensuring our people's access to the modern corporate economy. Today, the Native Corporation's profits are distributed to more than 10,000 shareholders in the form of dividends, jobs, economic development and educational opportunities.



## Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation (BBAHC)

The Health Corporation operates the Kakanak Hospital and the Bristol Bay Service Unit, delivering not only primary and emergency healthcare services but also wellness and health education programs to the region. Like BBNA, BBAHC is actively engaged in compacting with the federal government to promote self-determination in the allocation of funding from congressional healthcare programs.



## Bristol Bay Housing Authority (BBHA)

The Housing Authority has built more than 500 single family homes and apartment units in an effort to provide safe, decent and affordable housing to the Natives of Bristol Bay – especially our elders. Though separately incorporated, BBHA's commissioners are appointed by the BBNA executive board.



## Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (BBEDC)

The youngest of the BBs, BBEDC's mission is to promote economic opportunities for the Natives of Bristol Bay through stewardship and sustainable use of Bering Sea resources. In particular, the Development Corporation works with the Alaska Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program to provide training, loans, and permits for access to the commercial fishing industry.

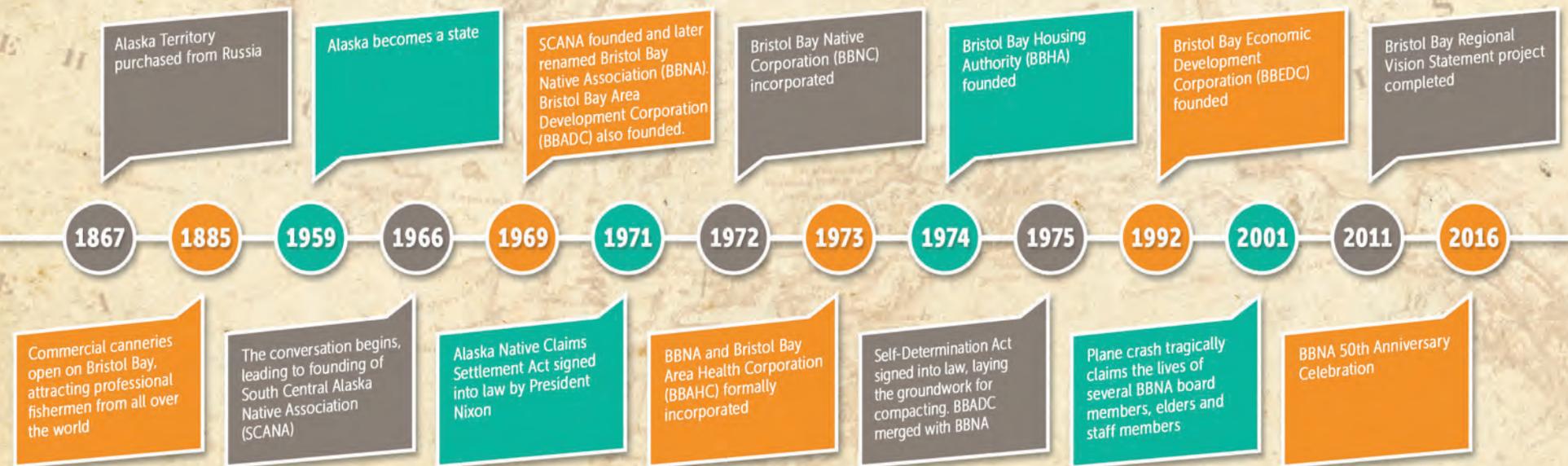
# HISTORY OF THE BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION

**The Bristol Bay Native Association** was born out of the need to preserve a connection to our land that was already thousands of years old when the first outsiders arrived to fish our waters. Among other changes, the arrival of the Western culture brought with it the need to formalize that connection in a legal sense to ensure the preservation of our way of life. This has always been the mission of the Native Association, even though the details may have changed over our first 50 years of service. So many important moments have led up to the successes that we can claim today, but for the purposes of this timeline we've focused on the most significant legal turning points in our journey.

The Alaska Purchase, statehood, and the passage of ANCSA are obvious points of inflection in our relationship with the federal government. The formation of the Native Association and its partners "BBs" always coincided with major steps in establishing our government-to-government relationship with the United States. The passage of the Self-Determination Act was critical for formalizing the processes by which we continue to work for self-determination even today. The tragic plane crash in 2001 took some of our best and brightest, but they would be proud of the vision of unity and perseverance that emerged a decade later in our Regional Visioning Project.

## THE BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION WAS BORN OUT OF THE NEED TO PRESERVE A CONNECTION TO OUR LAND.

Now, for our 50th Anniversary, we can look back on past victories and forward to future abundance for our people, all thanks to the lessons our elders taught us about courage, togetherness, and self-sacrifice.



# OUR VISION

**Between September 2010 and January 2011** five regional organizations in Bristol Bay partnered to design a process through which residents could envision the future of our region. Nine well-respected leaders from the region were chosen to serve as commissioners for the project, and to act as the “eyes and ears” of the Native Association as we, the people of the Bristol Bay communities, expressed our concerns and aspirations for the area. In excess of 1500 individuals were surveyed in more than 50 meetings among 26 different Bristol Bay communities. Every participant was given a voice in the conversation, with more than 89% of participants endorsing the regional Vision – a vision that now carries the authority of the people of Bristol Bay.

The Vision that we share for our region is an echo of the original spirit that brought our elders together 50 years ago: the foundation of our lives is strong, healthy families connected to the land and waters of our region. We want education for our young people, access to subsistence resources, safety for our families, local jobs, and a strong voice in determining the future direction of the region. Most importantly, the Visioning project reestablished the core attitude that made our elders in the land claims struggles: we're willing to work together so our grandchildren can live successful lives on the land of their ancestors.



Bristol Bay Regional Vision commissioners at work.

# CELEBRATING OUR UNITY

**The Visioning project** produced a wealth of specific insights into our common values, but the secret to our success has been the same for 50 years: unity. We all want the same things for our children and grandchildren, and we're willing to work together to get them. As a resident of Naknek said, “When we have similarities we should be partners. We're more effective if we can work together.” It's the same lesson our elders would teach us from the days of ANCSA, and it holds true today. It's time to celebrate our unity!

# SHARED VALUES CULTURE AND SUBSISTENCE

- ▶ Family, a connection to the land, and subsistence activities are most important for our lives today and into the future plus encourage good stewardship practices.
- ▶ Our culture is tied to a subsistence lifestyle – community gatherings that include instruction by elders in culture-based subsistence activities are important for maintaining our cultural values.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ We welcome sustainable economic development based on renewable resources. Any large development in the region must not threaten land or waters.
- ▶ Meaningful development will require us to work together for a coordinated approach to a reduction of energy costs, to provide business training, and to ensure long-term protection of fish and game stock.
- ▶ Commercial fishing is the cornerstone of our regional economy – we want increased access to limited entry permits and continued fish quality improvement. We need unified, regional efforts to expand markets for our fish, as well as programs to make entry into the commercial fishing industry affordable for our young people.

# SAFE AND HEALTHY FAMILIES

- ▶ Our deepest concerns are for the prevention of alcohol/drug abuse and domestic violence.
- ▶ We believe wellness programs and education are an effective way to combat substance and domestic abuse.
- ▶ We believe that frequent community gatherings will help to promote stronger families and healthier communities.
- ▶ The vast majority of us believe that, “We can live healthy and productive lives here in the next 25 years.”

# EDUCATION

- ▶ Our regional education system should emphasize preparation for college and vocational schools.
- ▶ We believe positive role models are the most important factor for creating successful students: as adults, we need to embody the values and behaviors we expect from our young people.
- ▶ Families and communities need to actively engage with local schools to communicate these values and priorities.

# THREE GENERATIONS OF SERVICE



**William P. Johnson** – William was the first Secretary/Treasurer of SCANA (the organization later renamed as BBNA), then Executive Director, and eventually President of both BBNA and the Bristol Bay Area Development Corporation. One of the five original incorporators of BBNC under ANCSA, he's served in official and executive capacities for several Native and commercial fishing-related organizations, all while working as a successful boat captain for more than 50 years. William is a shining example of those elders that gave their time freely to guarantee our future on the lands of our ancestors.



**Fred T. "Ted" Angasan**, Chairman – Ted joined BBNA as Program Development Specialist shortly after its formation, replacing William Johnson upon his promotion to Executive Director – a position Ted held as well after William was appointed President of BBADC. Ted was also among the five original BBNC incorporators. He was born in South Naknek, and still serves on both its Village Council, as well as chairing the BBNA Executive Board. Ted is an elder and successful businessman that has given of his time, effort, and wisdom for half a century.



**Robert Heyano**, Secretary and Board Member – Robert was a founding board member of the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA) as well as its first president, a post he held for more than a decade. A successful commercial fisherman for more than 40 years, he recently earned the Highliner of the Year Award from National Fisherman magazine. Not only does he serve on the BBNA Board and Ekuk Village Council, but he has published articles in the Alaska Dispatch News and other periodicals in an effort to protect our land and waters from harmful developments like the Pebble Mine.



**Thomas Tilden**, Vice-Chairman – Tommy has served as councilman and mayor of Dillingham, where he was born. He grew up hunting, fishing, and gathering plants and berries along the Nushagak River. In addition to his work with BBNA, Tom is very active in his advocacy for his people and our region as Chief of the Curyung Village Council and village representative on the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) board of directors. He strongly believes in a bright future for our region because of the legacy of aggressive action taken by our elders and the lessons we've learned from their work.



**Margie Nelson**, Board Member – Margie is the representative for Koliganek on the BBNA board. She also serves as the Native Association's appointee on the board of directors for the Alaska Legal Services Corporation (ALSC), a non-profit law firm dedicated to providing pro-bono civil legal services to low-income communities. During the 50th Anniversary project, Margie shared a memory of listening to her elders' stories and thinking that she would never have a story of her own to tell. Now, through her work with the BBNA and ALSC, she has some of the most important stories of all.



**Ralph Andersen**, President and CEO of BBNA – Born in Clark's Point, Ralph spent much of his adolescence and early adulthood studying in the lower 48, most notably at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, before completing his education at UAF in 1979. He then moved to Barrow and held positions with the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (another of the ANCSA corporations like BBNC), Iliisagvik College and North Slope Borough. In 1998, Ralph and his family returned to the Bristol Bay region so that he could put his education and career experience to work for his people.



**Wassiliisa "DeeDee" Bennis**, CAO – DeeDee has a deep passion for recording our elders' stories of the land claims struggles and extensive knowledge of the Native Association's history. Born in Dillingham, DeeDee has served in a variety of capacities at BBNA over the last 40 years. DeeDee has participated in the region's commercial fishery, and she delights in traditional subsistence activities. She made those traditions a priority when raising her children and believes that has kept them connected to the region.



**Jaclyn Christensen**, Treasurer and Board Member (Port Heiden). Jackie was the youngest contributor to the project and her story embodies one of the virtues that drive our optimism about our young people. She said it well when she described our people as "resilient to change," not resistant to it, in reference to the greenhouses and livestock that residents of Port Heiden are using to make up for the loss of access to caribou hunts. This kind of farming was never before part of our traditions, but the world changed and the people responded.

## UNITY IS WHAT DRIVES OUR RESILIENCE.

**That resiliency carried us when, on the morning of October 10, 2001**, a tragedy befell our region. Shortly after takeoff from Dillingham, the PenAir flight carrying four BBNA board members, three staffers (one accompanied by her teenage son), and an elder from Point Heiden, lost control and crashed near Wood River Road. The pilot and eight of the nine passengers died instantly. Among them was Jackie's father-in-law, John Christensen Sr., as was MaryAnn Christensen, who later died of her injuries.

We lost important leaders that morning. Many of us, like Jackie, lost loved ones. Despite this tragedy, the memories that were shared for the 50th Anniversary project were of togetherness. Tom remembers shaking hands with the board members at the meeting that brought them to Dillingham. Margie remembers wondering at how happy Andrew was the last time she saw him. DeeDee remembers the community coming together to support one another, and to observe our funeral traditions. The unity that made our elders successful in the land claims struggles comforted us in this time of loss. That same unity is what drives our resilience. 15 years later, Jackie serves in John's place on the board. She also serves as a reminder of those we lost, as well as of our hope for the future.

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## IN HONOR OF THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES

### FULL BOARD MEMBERS:

Richard Takak of Chignik Lake  
Carla Grunert of Chignik Lagoon  
Andrew Abyo of Pilot Point  
Johnny Christensen, Sr. of Port Heiden

### BBNA STAFFERS:

Valerie Larson of Dillingham, Director of the BBNA Head Start Program  
Virginia Andrew of Aleknagik, Head Start Program staff member  
MaryAnn Christensen of Port Heiden, Elder Escort

### ALSO ABOARD:

Lena Matson, elder from Port Heiden  
Ross Grunert, son of Carla Grunert  
Gordon Mills, PenAir Pilot

A Full Board meeting was held at the Native Association on October 8th and 9th, 2001. The above board members were in Dillingham for the board meeting and were travelling home when the crash cut their service short. Native Association staff members were also travelling for work on that fateful day. Valerie and Virginia were on their way to continue their service to the region by launching a new Head Start site, while MaryAnn was acting as escort to Lena Matson, who had been receiving medical care in Dillingham.

We've honored the memories of several of these individuals by name, naming the Dillingham Family Resource Center after Valerie A. Larson, and the classrooms it houses after the other staff and board members. We also wish to commemorate their sacrifice here by telling the final chapter of their stories as part of our story.

# THE STORY SO FAR...

**THE STORY OF THE FIRST 50 YEARS OF THE BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION IS THE STORY OF THE INDIVIDUALS THAT GAVE SO MUCH TO MAKE US WHO WE ARE TODAY.**

**Stories are important.** Our lives are made up of them – our own stories as well as the stories we experience through the eyes of others. They entertain us, and also teach us many things about the world and about ourselves. They communicate values and beliefs, history, and bring us together in a way that lets us share our common experience. They tell us who we are, and where we came from. And, if we listen well, the best stories tell us where we're going.

The story of the first 50 years of the Bristol Bay Native Association is the story of the individuals that gave so much to make us who we are today. Some of our elders that did the most to fight for our land are already gone, but we're lucky to have others that can still remember and remind us. We brought together a group that represented three generations of Bristol Bay Natives: elders that were there when the conversation began to the young people that give us hope for the future. We listened to their stories. The narrative that emerged was powerful.

Like most things in Bristol Bay, it all began with fishing. In the spring, fishermen from all of the villages were in Dillingham, where they were already working together in organizations like WACMA and Tonuak. The shared need to get fair prices for their catch brought them together, so it was a natural step to turn their attention to another common problem: the Land Claims fight.

It was the late 60s, before ANCSA, but the federal government's War on Poverty created funding for Community Action Programs like RurAL CAP. RurAL CAP channeled state and federal funds into regional non-profits and Native development cooperatives – like BBNA. In 1969, the Bristol Bay Area Development Corporation (BBADC) was formed as one of nine RurAL CAP subsidiaries. Our elders at the Development Corporation, who were also members of the Native Association, focused on the problem that all our people shared at the time: the need to file for Native Allotments that would secure individual ownership of our land.

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## ANCSA CHANGED EVERYTHING, FOR THE NATIVE ASSOCIATION AND FOR OUR PEOPLE AS WELL

The Native Association continued to work hard to organize, elect officers, and press for settlement of Native land claims by the federal government, but was still unincorporated and without funding. Our elders weren't paid for their work in the Land Claims fight. They juggled traditional subsistence with commercial fishing and other careers while taking on the federal government. They remember submitting documents five and six times because a handful of commas were out of place, but they wouldn't give up. Finally, on December 18th, 1971 their tireless efforts and personal sacrifice were rewarded and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was signed into law by President Richard Nixon.

ANCSA changed everything, for the Native Association and for our people as well. It ensured that our land would remain our land, with the surface rights administered by the Village Corporations while the subsurface estate and compensation monies would be managed by a regional for-profit Native Corporation: the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, in our case. The lands of our ancestors were safe – made legally ours, by an Act of Congress – and the dividends paid to shareholders in the Corporation opened the door to new economic possibilities for the region. It was an historic victory for the people of Bristol Bay, and for all Alaska Natives. The change that ANCSA brought to the Native Association was the shift to a focus on the delivery of social services in the region that were normally handled by state and federal agencies. Programs constructed at this level were simply unable to address the unique challenges of our region, and the communities expressed their desire for a more culturally approachable and responsive source. With land claims and dividends being handled by the village and regional corporations, the Native Association addressed this desire. Focusing on delivery of social services allowed the members of the Native Association to work toward greater self-determination for our people by channeling more state and federal funding into programs designed by us and for us.

Formal incorporation of the Native Association came in 1973 and the Development Corporation was legally merged with the Association in 1975, the same year that the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (P.L. 93-638) was passed. The Self-Determination Act allowed the Native Association to start adding programs that had been administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), a frustratingly sluggish and unresponsive bureaucracy. The Native Association began to operate several other grants, including employment and job training programs under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) in the late 70s, the Village Public Safety Officer program was added in the early 80s, and Head Start began in the early 90s.

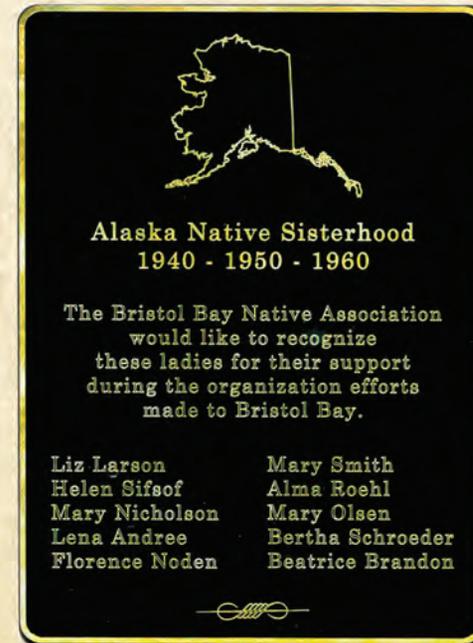
Compacting was the next major victory for Alaska Natives. Amendments to the Self-Determination Act made it possible for the Native Association's members to negotiate a Compact of Self-Governance in 1995, which combines all available BIA funding into a consolidated, recurring agreement that continues to be the Native Association's single largest source of funding. Compacting gives us the direct control over funding that we need to tailor the Native Association's programs to the specific needs of our communities, and also allows us to empower the Tribal Councils with the maximum amount of local control. It's no wonder some of our elders who were there 50 years ago, when the conversation began, point to compacting as one of our greatest achievements.

## REMEMBERING THOSE THAT GAVE THEIR TIME FREELY

**It was a challenge** to compile a "history" for the Native Association. So-called "historical" documents like articles of incorporation did serve as resources for this project, but such documents may or may not have survived the last fifty years. Even when they do still exist, they often fail to tell the whole story. So many of our elders served in many different positions across various organizations and their focus was always on the work that needed to be done, not on keeping historical records.

That's why we set out to tell a story rather than record a history. History is about facts, but stories are about remembering. While it's important to recognize the contributions of specific individuals when we can, as we have done for the women of the Alaska Native Sisterhood with the plaque on display at the Native Association's Dillingham headquarters, what we really wanted to do for the Native Association's 50th anniversary was to remember all of our people that came together and gave their time freely. Historical documents are a part of the Western culture – in our culture we use stories to remember.

### HISTORY IS ABOUT FACTS, BUT STORIES ARE ABOUT REMEMBERING.



Native Land Claims warriors included members of the Alaska Native Sisterhood, whose efforts are remembered in a commemorative plaque on display at BBNA.

# BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION'S FIRST BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Ronald Aaberg** - Pedro Bay  
**Andrew Abyo** - Pilot Point  
**Phillip Akelkok** - Ekwok  
**Henry Alakayak** - Manokotak  
**Jake Aleck** - Chignik Lake  
**Julius Anderson** - Chignik Lagoon  
**John Apokedak** - Levelock  
**Allan Aspelund** - Naknek  
**Wilbur Bavilla** - Togiak  
**John Christensen** - Port Heiden  
**Joseph Clark** - Clarks Point  
**Nick D. Gregory** - Egegik  
**Charles Groat** - Igiugig  
**Robert Heyano** - Ekuak  
**George Ilutsik** - Aleknagik  
**William Johnson** - Dillingham  
**Joe Kalmakoff** - Ivanof Bay  
**Dorothy Larson** - Anchorage  
**Donald Nielsen** - South Naknek  
**Herman Nelson** - Koliganek  
**Steve Noatak** - Kokhanok  
**Thomas Riley** - Ugashik  
**Herman Schroeder** - Dillingham  
**Arthur Skonberg** - Chignik  
**Billy Trefon** - Nondalton  
**Christopher Sharp** - Twin Hills  
**Alex Wassillie** - Newhalen/Iliamna  
**Blunka Wassilliey** - Portage Creek  
**Timothy Wonhola** - New Stuyahok

## OUR FUTURE

**The story of BBNA** is the story of those that gave their time freely and worked together to achieve the best possible future for our people. It's also a story of change, and how we've adapted – both as a people and as an organization.

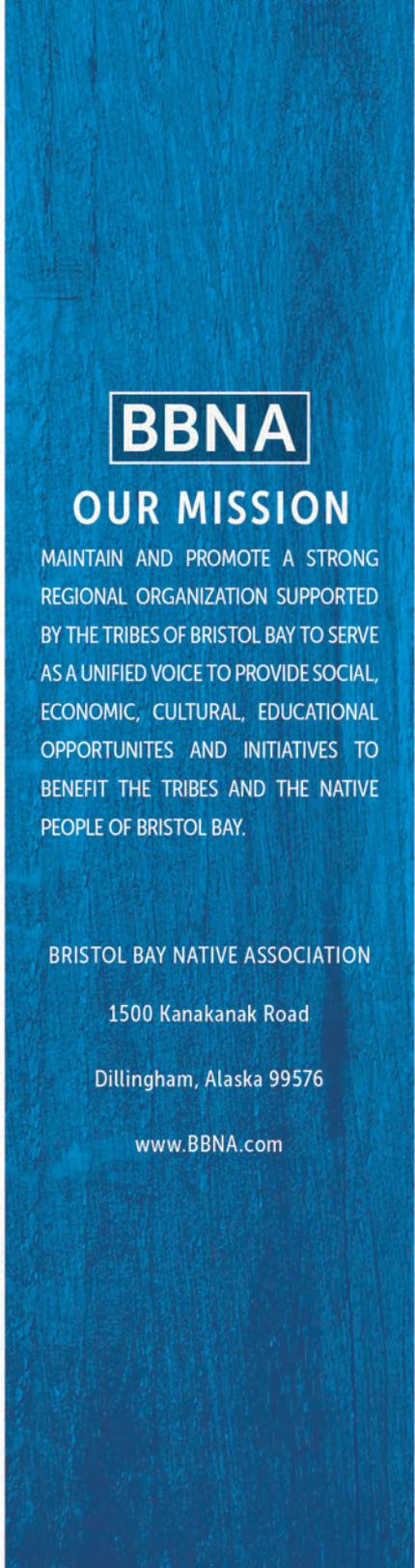
Our work began with helping our fishermen who grew up in our waters to be competitive in the commercial fishing industry. Next, we taught ourselves how to engage with the federal government to ensure the right to determine the direction of region, and to establish that our lands will always be ours. Then, once we had provided our people with a seat at the table in the modern corporate economy, we adapted yet again and shifted our focus to providing education, healthcare, and affordable housing. As needs changed, we've changed.

And that is our vision for the future direction of the Native Association: when our people have a need, they will always be able to come to BBNA. We recognize that we still have much work to do: we need good jobs in the region, and the infrastructure to support them so that our young people know there is a future for them here. We must continue to face the dangers of substance abuse and domestic violence in our communities. Our land and waters require that we be good stewards so that they will continue to provide for our grandchildren. We want our people to know that we will be there every step of the way, continuing to work together to face these and any other problems that arise. William Johnson of Dillingham said it best when he said, "Any person, any village that has a problem – they can come to BBNA."

Stories have always been important to our cultures – they tell us who we are and where we came from. We are so very fortunate to have such incredible natural resources, to have such courageous elders, and to be a people that is willing to focus on what unites us. We must continue to tell their story so that it's never forgotten. Pride in our heritage and in our accomplishments, is what will keep us unified, and that's what will keep us strong.

**WE WANT OUR PEOPLE TO KNOW THAT  
WE WILL BE THERE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.**





**BBNA**

## OUR MISSION

MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE A STRONG REGIONAL ORGANIZATION SUPPORTED BY THE TRIBES OF BRISTOL BAY TO SERVE AS A UNIFIED VOICE TO PROVIDE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITES AND INITIATIVES TO BENEFIT THE TRIBES AND THE NATIVE PEOPLE OF BRISTOL BAY.

BRISTOL BAY NATIVE ASSOCIATION

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