

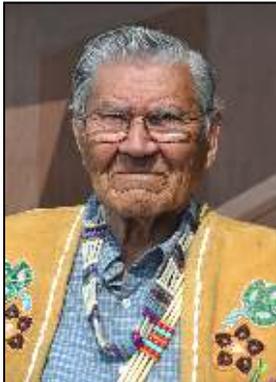


Our Culture Unites us; Our Land Sustains us; Our People are Prosperous

April 17, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ahtna Traditional First Chief Fred Ewan Passes Away at 103



Glennallen, Alaska – Ahtna Traditional First Chief Fred Ewan passed away Thursday afternoon, April 16, in Gulkana, surrounded by his family. As the traditional leader of the Ahtna people, Chief Ewan was the embodiment of the Ahtna culture and way of life.

Ahtna, Inc. president Michelle Anderson shared that, “He was an active participant in his home village of Gulkana, attending community gatherings and meetings. He enjoyed fiddle dancing and drumming and singing traditional Ahtna songs. More recently, he delighted in the celebration of his birthdays where he was a gracious host, welcoming friends from near and far. Chief Ewan was a huge part of Gulkana Chapel, shaking the hands of those coming in for the service and patiently waiting until he was called up after every sermon to give the closing prayer. I will remember him for his incredible energy, his amazing recall of traditional Ahtna knowledge (which includes our land and our language) his infectious laugh, and his embodiment of an older Ahtna era. He was a beloved Chief and will be sadly missed by his people.”

Gulkana Village Council president Eileen Ewan shared memories of Chief Ewan, who was himself a former Council president. “He was the first water operator for Gulkana Village Council in the early 70’s and served in the position for over 20 years. He liked to know what was going on within the village and attended as many Council meetings as he could. He loved Jesus and would let everyone know that they need to be ready. He would sit in the back of the church in his recliner and open and close the service with prayer.

“We will miss him at our summer culture camp,” remarked Ms. Ewan. “He always had a good story to share and loved to sing Ahtna songs, drum, dance and attend fiddling festivals. He never once complained about his age, he was always known to say something to anyone, and he had a name for everyone. He loved to go for drives around the village and would go to other villages for funerals and potlatches. We will miss his laughter and his welcoming remarks as he greeted us, and his legacy will carry on.”

Chief Ewan was born in a small cabin at Crosswind Lake (about 30 miles from Gulkana, Alaska) on August 15, 1916 to John and Katie Ewan (Tsisyu-Seagull Clan). Fred would say that he remembered his exact time of birth - 3 o’clock in the afternoon - although it’s not officially recorded. When asked how he knew this, he would reply that even as a baby he could see the sunlight, to which one could only laugh at his cheery attitude and humor.

Chief Ewan lived in the Dry Creek Village near the Gulkana airport prior to moving to Gulkana Village. He married Stella (Gene) of Gakona in 1938, and the couple adopted Stella’s sister’s sons Norman and Harry. Chief Ewan was active in the early days of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), serving as vice president of Camp No. 31. He worked as a grader operator for the Alaska Road Commission and helped build the Gulkana airport. He and the late Roy Ewan owned and operated the E&E General Store

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in Gulkana. Chief Ewan was a man of faith and was licensed to preach the gospel in 1959 and ordained by the Glennallen Community Chapel in 1972.

“When I first moved to Gulkana, Chief Ewan was the Pastor at Gulkana Chapel,” said Nick Jackson, Ahtna, Inc. director and Gulkana resident and Council member. “I remember him making an announcement, ‘Sunday school at 10 o’clock. Bring your children – don’t send them, bring them.’ I thought it was a good way to encourage the parents to come to church. Fred was a happy person, always greeting you cheerfully. We are going to miss him, but I believe he is in Heaven rejoicing, no more pain, sorrow or tears.”

Chief Ewan came from a line of chiefs; his father and grandfather were also chiefs. He was named Second Chief in 2006 when his long-term friend Ben Neeley became First Chief. After the passing of beloved Chief Ben Neeley in 2014, Fred became Traditional First Chief.

He was a skilled hunter, trapper and fisherman and was known for how fast he could cut fish. He often talked about how important it is to protect the land that feeds us and to work hard for things that matter – land, people and culture. He was an avid supporter of traditional singing and drumming, teaching the youth and providing guidance to the dance groups.

“Chief Ewan was my Uncle and taught me how to drum and sing traditional Ahtna songs,” said Ahtna, Inc. chairman Ken Johns.

Chief Ewan would say that the trick to being young is to just tell yourself what age you are and be it. He was the oldest living Ahtna shareholder, but still attended as many Ahtna and village events as he could. During invocations he would speak about how we should lift each other up and take care of one another.

“Lord willing, we all live a long life. The future of Ahtna is in how we treat each other today. Take care of the land, families and each other, and work hard,” he said before the celebration of his 100th birthday.

Chief Ewan’s family would like to express their gratitude for the well-wishes from friends, family, and others during the family’s time of sorrow.

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For more information regarding Chief Ewan, including details on funeral arrangements and donations, please contact Ahtna Board Chairman Ken Johns at (907) 205-0328.