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Press Release

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

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ALASKA'S STATE MUSEUMS ARE A MUST-SEE STOPS FOR SOUTHEAST VISITORS

Visitors to Southeast Alaska have the opportunity to explore much more of the great state when they visit one or both of Alaska's state-run museums. The Alaska State Museum, located in the capital city of Juneau, has a long-standing reputation for quality displays of Alaska Native cultural materials, as well as exhibits on the state's history and art.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum, in the old Russian capital of Sitka, is a smaller museum, focused on its world-class collection of Alaska Native materials dating from prior to 1930. Every summer, the museum hosts contemporary Alaska Native artists who demonstrate their crafts for visitors.

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

The Alaska State Museum, located in downtown Juneau on Whittier Street, is home to more than 31,000 artifacts, specimens and works of art. The museum was established more than 100 years ago and many of its materials are unsurpassed anywhere in the world. A life-sized eagle-nesting tree delights visitors as they enter the museum. A winding ramp spirals upward around the tree, above a large brown bear, and under suspended eagles, providing access to the museum's second-floor galleries.

Among the museum's most popular exhibits are those featuring Alaska's distinct Native populations generally grouped in the museum's galleries by geographic region and shared cultural ideologies – Northwest Coast, Athabascan, Inupiaq, and Yup'ik Eskimo and Aleut. Many visitors are surprised at the diversity and richness of the state's Native American heritage as well as the defining character of the land's great distances and rugged geography. One of the most popular exhibits replicates part of a traditional Tlingit clan house, with a wall screen, totemic house posts, and dancers in ceremonial dress.

Since Alaska was under Russian dominion until 1867, icons and other objects from Russian America days are on display, as are items from the American expansion into Alaska, including Gold Rush memorabilia, maritime exhibits, early commerce and tourism. A scaled-down version of the stern of Captain George Vancouver's ship, Discovery, is dry-docked in the museum's children's room, giving kids a chance to climb and explore.

The Alaska State Museum also hosts temporary exhibits by contemporary Alaska artists throughout the year. This summer, opening on April 2, 2010, the museum is showing the work of Juneau painter Sue Kraft. Kraft has lived, worked and painted in Alaska for over 30 years and has participated in numerous juried art shows in the state. Her paintings range from small watercolors to large oil paintings.

Kraft was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest and earned her BFA from the University of Washington. Her work is represented in the permanent collections at the Alaska State Museum, the Anchorage Museum of History & Art, the State Art Bank, the Juneau-Douglas City Museum, the ARCO Collection, the Alaska State Ferry MV Fairweather, and many private collections.

Volunteers offer tours of the museum during the summer and by special arrangement during the rest of the year. The museum's store, operated by The Friends of the Alaska State Museum, features baskets, jewelry and carved objects made by Alaskans, as well as books and note cards.

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

Founded in 1888, the Sheldon Jackson Museum is the oldest continuously operated museum in Alaska. It is housed in Alaska's first concrete building, constructed in 1895, and now included on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1984 the State of Alaska purchased the Sheldon Jackson Museum, formerly part of Sheldon Jackson College, to prevent its collection from being sold outside the state. The museum is located a short walk from town.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum houses an exceptional collection of Alaska Native artifacts, many of them collected by the Reverend Dr. Sheldon Jackson, a Presbyterian missionary and General Agent for Education for Alaska. The collection is unique in part because of Dr. Jackson's opportunities in the 1880s and 1890s to visit and collect from all parts of Alaska and coastal Siberia.

Displays at the museum, while upgraded to meet modern museum standards, still retain the Victorian-era feel of the original exhibit design. Elaborate ceremonial regalia, utilitarian tools, weapons and clothing are exhibited in cases, while visible storage drawers hold ivory carvings, games, jewelry and other small items of household and hunting importance.

Jackson stated that his goal in gathering the material and opening the museum was so the "coming generations of Natives would know how their forefathers lived." The collection is frequently used by contemporary artists to study the styles and techniques of earlier generations.

During the summer the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum, a support group, sponsors Alaska Native artists who demonstrate their skills at the museum. The artists, representing all the indigenous cultures of Alaska, might work in wood, ivory carving, basketry, textiles or beadwork.

Docents are on hand to interpret exhibits for summer visitors. The Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum operates a gift shop with fine Alaska Native crafts, books and cards.

Summer hours at the Alaska State Museum are 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. General admission is \$5. Hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and admission is \$4. Visitors 18 and younger are admitted free to both museums.

For more information about either museum, contact Lisa Golisek, Alaska State Museum, 395 Whittier St., Juneau, AK 99801, (907) 465-2901, or: lisa.golisek@alaska.gov. The museums' Web page is: www.museums.state.ak.us.

Images from both museums are available for media use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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