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## **Dillingham educator named Alaska's 2007 Teacher of the Year**

Alaska's 2007 Teacher of the Year is Ina Bouker, a first grade teacher at Dillingham Elementary School.

Alaska Education Commissioner Roger Sampson announced the appointment of Bouker in Anchorage today at the annual conference of the Association of Alaska School Boards. Her term begins January 1, 2007.

"As Teacher of the Year, Ina exemplifies the many Alaska teachers who have a positive impact on children," Commissioner Sampson said. "But it's especially inspiring that Ina grew up in the traditional Yup'ik community of Manokotak, learned English at school, became the first member of her family to graduate from college – and returned to Southwest Alaska to teach."

Sampson also announced that Joseph Nolting, who teaches language arts at Teeland Middle School in Wasilla, is the alternate Alaska Teacher of the Year. Nolting would serve in the Alaska position if Bouker is named National Teacher of the Year.

Bouker has taught for 17 years, mostly in Dillingham. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Hawaii at Hilo and has earned more than 60 graduate credits at various educational institutions.

Bouker grew up in a large family in Manokotak with parents whose quiet and nonjudgmental parenting trained her to become the teacher she is today, she said. As a young child at school, she found it hard to understand the meaning of English words because they referred to things outside of her village. Today, as a teacher, "I make sure that students experience by seeing, hearing and feeling what it is that I am teaching," she said.

A lesson on primary shapes might use rocks. Bouker tells the children a story of how she found the rocks while fishing for salmon. She paints a picture in their minds of the beach. She has them repeat after her in English, Yup'ik and sign language what the shape is called.

Bouker goes further and points out the vowels and consonants in the word, and uses it as an opportunity to teach syllables. She has the children hold the rock and draw a design that will be the basis for a Yup'ik dance headdress. She beats out the design patterns with a traditional drum. She tells children the story of the dance, and they write it out, and eventually sing the song of the dance.

“Just as my body needs a balance of nutrition, how I educate my students to evolve as healthy learners is a balance of well-rounded teaching methods,” Bouker said. “Just as my body is not capable to live only on air, water or food, children are not able to learn only by kinesthetic, visual or auditory methods. If I respect my body, I will provide food that is most nutritious and whole. If I respect my students, I will do my duty to reach them so that I can help them become lifelong learners.”

Commissioner Sampson will enter Bouker as the Alaska candidate for the 2007 National Teacher of the Year. The national winner will be recognized at an event in Washington, D.C., in April. The Council of Chief State School Officers sponsors the competition.

Additionally, the Smarter Kids Foundation will donate approximately \$20,000 worth of equipment to Bouker’s classroom.

A statewide selection committee appointed by Commissioner Sampson recommended Bouker from a field of four finalists. Besides Bouker and Nolting, the other finalists were Hal Neace, who teaches science at Homer Middle School, and Charles Strauss, who teaches math at South Anchorage High School.

Members of the selection committee were: Mary Becker, President of the Association of Alaska School Boards; Barbara Nagengast, President of the Alaska Council of School Administrators; Dee Parsons, President of the Alaska Parent Teacher association; Bill Bjork, President of National Education Association-Alaska; and Arlene Sandberg, 2006 Alaska Teacher of the Year.

Note to radio and TV reporters: The winner’s name is pronounced EYE-na BOW-ker.

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