

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

HONORING

JOSEPHINE TATAUQ BOURDON

The members of the Thirty-Second Alaska State Legislature recognize Josephine Tatauq Bourdon for over thirty years of public service to the people and communities of the Bering Straits Region.

Josephine, a lifelong resident of Nome, was born May 10, 1964 to Esther and David Bourdon. Her childhood was deeply connected to the seasonal cycles and the land. She and her extended family hunted, fished, gathered berries, and preserved food together throughout the year. While harvesting she was taught valuable lessons such as “only take what you need”, “don’t bring harm or turmoil to any living thing”, and “don’t waste anything”.

Josephine’s parents stressed the importance of education and supported all the children’s school activities. From a young age, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. She loved school and working with children; spent her free time babysitting for local families; was a junior summer camp counselor; and completed a work-study position at a childcare center. Josephine graduated from Nome-Beltz High School in 1982 and in 1988 she earned her Bachelor of Education from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She was the first member in her immediate family to attain a college degree, something that made her parents very happy and proud.

After teaching in Wales for two years, Josephine taught the next twenty-eight years at the Nome Elementary school, retiring in 2018. While growing up, Inupiaq was not readily spoken or taught in regional schools. Josephine set out to change that when she became an educator. As a Cultural Studies teacher, Josephine enjoyed watching her students perform and develop a love for the local language and culture. “Culture is a people’s place, their language, their history, their food,” Josephine has explained. She worked during and after school hours helping students with a variety of activities such as creating stop-motion films about life in Nome, preparing for the Inupiaq Spelling Bee, making arctic fox fur ruffs, and completing beadwork projects.

Josephine’s passion is to promote and revitalize language and culture through various projects like the “Inupiuraagluta-kupiamik imigluta” at the Katirvik Cultural Center. With the local radio station, KNOM, she created Inupiaq language spots which earned the “Best Station-Oriented Community Service Project” award from the Alaska Broadcasters Association in 2017. Along with her mother Esther, she has written articles for the local newspaper, “Inupiuraqta! Let’s Speak Inupiaq!” and also provides Inupiaq language workshops through the Northwest Campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

When she is not teaching, Josephine is leading the Inupiaq Choir at the Community United Methodist Church and supporting her community as a member of the Sitnasuak Native Corporation’s Elders Committee. She was elected to be the Norton Sound Elder Representative for First Alaskans Institute’s (FAI) 2019 Statewide Elders & Youth Council where she helped plan FAI’s Statewide Elders & Youth Conference 2020. Josephine is often called upon to translate terminology or phrases from English to Inupiaq for different organizations and the State of Alaska Division of Elections.

The members of the Thirty-Second Alaska State Legislature commend Josephine Tatauq Bourdon for the over thirty years of public service educating the children and people of the Bering Straits Region. They express their sincerest gratitude and wish her success in her future endeavors.



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