



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Alaska Region | October - December 2024

# SOURDOUGH NEWS



— Celebrating —  
Team Alaska



Crafting Alaska-made  
Tree Ornaments

Awarding Employee  
Excellence

Broadcasting the  
Bears of Anan

14

TO: West Lawn, U.S. Capitol  
FROM: Wrangell, AK

# The People's Tree spreads peace, happiness, and joy on 4,000 mile journey



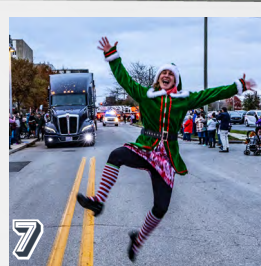
(1) Recreation Management Specialist Meghan Chamberlain places ornaments on the tree before departure from Wrangell, AK.



(2) Members of the public sign the trailer banner in Renton, WA.



(3) Interpretation and Education Specialist Claire Froehlich, Interpretation & Conservation Education Program Manager Annette Heckart, and Begich Boggs Visitor Center Director Kyle Gallaher pose in Baker City, OR.

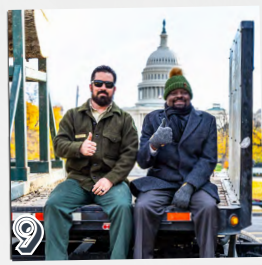


(4) Lynden truck driver John Schank poses with Smokey Bear in Pocatello, ID.

(5) Begich Boggs Visitor Center Director Kyle Gallaher works the education table in Grand Junction, CO.

(6) Public Affairs Officer Brandon Raile, Law Enforcement Officer Jimmy Nelson, and Digital Communications Specialist Melissa Kulack pose with Santa Claus in Altoona, IA.

(7) District Ranger Tory Houser, dressed as an elf, jumps for joy in Fort Wayne, IN.



(8) U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski and Deputy Forest Supervisor Barb Miranda hold a framed photo of this year's Capitol Christmas Tree logo at Joint Base Andrews.

(9) Forest Silviculturist Tom Roland and Society of American Foresters CEO Terry Baker arrive with the tree in Washington, D.C.



(10) Forest Service Chief Randy Moore and District Ranger Tory Houser pose in front of the delivery truck.

(11) Sandy Churchill, Esther Aaltséen Reese, and Mike Hoyt, members of the Wrangell Cooperative Association, give a tribal blessing during the tree lighting ceremony (not pictured: Lu Knapp).

(12) Youth Tree Lighter Rose Burke, fourth grader from Kenai, AK, delivers her winning essay during the tree lighting ceremony.

(13) **Front Row** (left to right): Melissa Kulack, Victoria Granado, Terry Baker (SAF), Sandy Churchill (WCA), Tory Houser, Lu Knapp (WCA). **Second Row** (left to right): Kayla Kirschenbaum (SAF), Tracy Christopherson, Julia Spofford, Claire Froehlich, Kyle Gallaher. **Back Row** (left to right): Mike Hoyt (WCA), Esther Aaltséen Reese (WCA), Trampus Barhaug, Brandon Raile, Elizabeth Buhl (SAF), John Brinley, Tony Belback, Jeremy Mack, Jeff Schramm, Jimmy Nelson, Annette Heckart, Barb Miranda, Joe Delabue, Clint Kolarich, Dave Kennedy, Shannon Holt, Lynda Nore, Justin Ross, Buffie Cerutti, Frank Churchill (WCA), Tom Roland, Chad VanOrmer.

(14) The delivery truck departs from Wrangell, AK.

Photos courtesy of James Edward Mills, Joy Trip Project.



## Thank you for delivering a lasting trail of holiday cheer!

# Alaska ornaments, art, and...unity

*Thousands of Alaska-made tree ornaments decked the halls on Capitol Hill, with many honoring Alaska Native Tribal traditions, culture and heritage*

In Alaska, holiday cheer began early this year. Alaskans and Alaska Native peoples spent their long summer days tapping into their inner artist, crafting nearly fifteen thousand beautifully hand-made ornaments to adorn the [U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree](#).

These ornaments were more than just impressive, festive decorations.

Many of the ornaments honor the state's rich and historic

Indigenous culture, as professional and amateur Alaska artists created designs inspired from nature, forests, wildlife, totem poles, and objects such as traditional Alaskan masks and beads.

Local tribal artist Mary Ann Rainey embraced the creative task by hosting an ornament making class at the Petersburg Public Library. Her class boasted an impressive turnout and forged forty ornaments to accompany the official Capitol Christmas tree—an 80-foot Sitka Spruce—from Alaska's National Forests to the nation's capital.

"Most of the designs we used belong to different Tribes—such as the shark, salmon, halibut, eagle, raven, sea pigeon, hummingbird, wolf—there was a lot of variety of animals," said Rainey.

## Passing down tradition

Rainey shared how her grandmother Kalk'ech (whom she is named after), would make moccasins and create beadwork using traditional beading techniques. Even as an experienced beader and after passing these techniques onto her own grandchildren, Rainey never imagined herself teaching a class on beadwork to more than a dozen



Finished ornaments from Mary Ann Rainey's class at the Petersburg Public Library. The top left ornament marks the State of Alaska with forget-me-nots, the state flower, and the Big Dipper and Polaris, representative of the Alaska state flag. The top right ornament depicts the Petersburg Indian Association logo, and the bottom ornament is a halibut fish. USDA Forest Service photo by Gina Uppencamp.

members of the community.

"I've shown my grandchildren how to craft things like this, but leading a class this size was a first for me. I would see things like this at craft shows and I thought, 'I can do that.' It was a fun challenge, and I think people enjoyed the class."

Rainey is a tribal member from clan Eagle/Shark from the Thunderbird House and made the trek to Washington, D.C with her niece to see the ornaments on the Capitol Christmas Tree.

Don and Vera Starbard, authors of *A Tlingit Christmas Caroling and Coloring*, were also eager to participate in the ornament making extravaganza. They donated images from their book to local youth to honor the Tlingit culture while contributing to the growing ornament total. The authors also helped with an ornament effort for local youth at the Huna Tribal House in Glacier Bay National Park.



Alaskan tribal member Mary Ann Rainey (clan Eagle/Shark from the Thunderbird House) holds two ornaments made from the class she hosted at the Petersburg Public Library. Photo by Kari Petersen, Petersburg Public Library programming director.



Local youth color ornament designs from donated pages of Don and Vera Starbard's book, *A Tlingit Christmas Caroling and Coloring*. USDA Forest Service photo by Meghan Chamberlain.



Hand painted ornaments depict traditional Alaska Native masks created by youth attending summer events hosted by the Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program. USDA Forest Service photo by Annette Heckart.

## Co-stewardship for all seasons

A testament to the co-stewardship between Alaska's tribal communities and land management agencies, the Tlingit and Haida tribes—among many others—participated in ornament creation, which further enriched the celebratory showcase of some of Alaska's most unique features.

The Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center's Cultural Ambassador Program, a mutual commitment between the [Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska](#) and the Forest Service to collaborate on managing the Tongass National Forest's recreation areas, highlighted the power of partnership.

Forest Service staff and cultural ambassadors joined forces to paint bear and fish shaped ornaments in the visitor center. Many of the painted ornaments were decorated using formline artwork—a type of Pacific Northwest Coast Native design often associated with totem poles, which depicts concepts and objects such as historic events or traditional Alaskan clan crests.

“It was a sure way to bring folks together,” shared Cultural Ambassador Program Manager Jeremy Timothy. “Anyone can be an artist, and when you combine art with history, it becomes a real opportunity to provide education on the rich heritage Alaska culture has to offer. I am pleased that we got the opportunity to create and share artwork from our visitors from around the world. At the end of the day, it's about bringing folks together and carrying on tradition. That's what we're all about.”

Throughout the summer, the [Alaska Native Science & Engineering Program](#) led multiple ornament making events for youth, with many designs highlighting Alaska Native masks. Traditionally, these masks serve many purposes, including use in local dances and honoring or warding off spirits. The tradition of using these masks continues to this day.

## Ornaments for all

In October, Senator Lisa Murkowski's office hosted an ornament-making booth at the [Alaska Federation of Natives convention](#), producing nearly two hundred ornaments

decorated by convention attendees. The booth also made an appearance at the Alaska State Fair, where visitors added nearly five hundred ornaments to the growing total.

The thousands of ornaments submitted for this effort showcase traditions of the past and a vibrant future for Alaska.

“The outpouring of response we received from so many folks across Alaska was truly astounding. It's really special to see these ornaments serve as a humble nod to the great state of Alaska and its rich cultural heritage,” shared Annette Heckart, the U.S. Forest Service's Alaska Region interpretation and conservation education program manager, who helped spearhead collection of this year's ornaments.

Alaska's sparkling efforts came alive when the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree was lit on Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2024. The decorations honor the interconnection between the Forest Service and tribes, highlighting the unique relationship between land and humans, past and future, culture and tradition. In one word: unity.