Extension home economist joins Gold Rush celebration

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Cooperative Extension Service home economist and consumer scientist for Juneau and its surrounding areas Sonja Koukel (koo-KELL) will join others in the community in celebration of Gold Rush Days, June 25 -26, at Dimond Park.

The community-wide event honoring Juneau’s Gold Rush heritage coincides with the 75th anniversary of the Cooperative Extension Service in Alaska. Created in 1930 as a department within the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, known today as University of Alaska Fairbanks, Extension today has offices throughout the state serving more than 60,000 Alaskans annually through workshops, seminars, personal consultations and publications. Koukel will be at the Gold Rush celebration all weekend.

From food preservation and master gardener classes to helping kids become better adults, or helping homeowners build energy efficient houses, Extension offers educational programs that have immediate and practical applications for Alaskans.

Koukel was named home economist for the Juneau district Extension office in January by Cooperative Extension Service Director for Alaska Tony Nakazawa.

“There is an enormous need for collaboration and sharing between Extension and other agencies and organizations serving families in Southeast Alaska,” Nakazawa said. “Koukel’s work and educational experiences as a business professional and educator of family and consumer sciences makes her the ideal person to ensure the needs of our audiences are met there.”

The position provides leadership for the development and delivery of home economics programs that serve adult and youth audiences, including basic health and nutrition, diabetes, food safety and preservation, financial planning, distance education delivery, clothing and textiles and consumer issues.

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“My husband and I are very excited about living in Alaska,” Koukel said. “I’m also energized by my role in strengthening existing partnerships with members of Southeast communities and I’m looking forward to building new relationships.”

Before arriving in Alaska, Koukel’s professional work experiences includes a variety of positions, including restaurant manager, district trainer for food service employees, fabrics store manager and entrepreneur. She also operated a sewing and vacuum cleaner business with her husband. As an educator she has worked in the private sector, as a public school substitute teacher and a college level teaching assistant.

Koukel holds a master’s degree and will earn a doctorate in family and consumer sciences education from Texas Tech University in Lubbock this fall.

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