Extension educators celebrate 75th anniversary

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Fairbanks, Alaska — The University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service continues its year-long 75th anniversary celebration by hosting an open house at the Tanana District office and a community reception at Signers' Hall Oct. 12.

The Tanana District’s open house on Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2 – 5 p.m. will feature educational displays and a tour of the “Smart Kitchen.” Extension faculty and staff in land resources, 4-H and youth development, and home economics will be on hand to answer questions or share a piece of anniversary cake. The Tanana District office is located at 1000 University Ave. in the old University Park elementary school; the open house will take place in the Smart Kitchen, Room 154.

UAF Chancellor Steve Jones and Extension Director Tony Nakazawa will co-host a reception later that evening at Signers' Hall on the UAF campus. A special tribute to Dr. Art Buswell, Extension director at UAF from 1961-1971, will take place during a short, informal program.

Under Buswell’s leadership, Cooperative Extension reached a degree of maturity which enabled it to further extend relevant university research to residents of the newly created state of Alaska. With programs in food safety, horticulture, housing and energy, forestry, and programs for youth, Extension's practical applications of research-based knowledge and educational outreach help create strong, sustainable communities, solve problems and meet the challenges that face the people of Alaska. Buswell remained an active supporter of Extension until his death in May 2005.

Special guest at the reception is Lyla Houglum, Executive Director for the Western Region Extension Directors Association (WEDA). Houglum serves as the primary liaison between Washington D.C. and Extension directors in the West to coordinate regional multi-state projects. She also has been asked to form a national consortium of states to support the Smart Gardening public television show produced by Oregon State University and Chambers

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Communications. Prior to her current position, Houglum was dean and director of the Oregon State University Extension Service.

“We’re pleased that Chancellor Jones, a former Extension educator himself, will help us in welcoming Dr. Houglum to Alaska,” Nakazawa said. “It’s also a great honor to have the Chancellor joining us at the reception to acknowledge Extension’s 75 years in Alaska. Not only is this an important milestone in Extension’s history, but in the history of the university and the state as well.”

Created in 1930 as a department within the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, Cooperative Extension is proud of its continued partnership with the AAC&SM, founded in 1917 and known today as the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Nakazawa pointed out that the first director of Extension in Alaska was the university’s founding president Charles Bunnell. Professor and head of the home economics department Lola Cremeans Tilly, whom Tilly Commons on the UAF campus is named, was hired by Bunnell in 1929. A 1937 collection of Tilly's canned salmon recipes is one of the university's earliest publications.

Tilly was hired following the departure of the AAC&SM’s previous home economics department head Lydia Fohn-Hansen, who was recruited in 1925 by Bunnell. After Fohn-Hansen’s marriage, she resigned her position following the college’s policy of the time which banned married women from the faculty. Fohn-Hansen did return to the college in 1930, however, to work with Bunnell as the assistant director of home economics in the newly created Cooperative Extension Service.

Throughout 2005, Cooperative Extension has been celebrating 75 years of service to Alaskans with special events and celebrations at Extension offices throughout the state. Extension’s first district office outside of Fairbanks opened in Palmer in 1936 where agents worked with some 200 families selected and transported to the Matanuska Valley to build a farming community under President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.

From one district office in Palmer, Cooperative Extension today has offices in Anchorage, Bethel, Delta Junction, Fairbanks, Glennallen, Juneau, Kodiak, Nome, Sitka, and Soldotna, and has affiliate offices with the Tanana Chiefs Conference, Eielson Air Force Base, Thorne Bay, and the Delta Mine Training Center.

As Alaska’s gateway to its university system, Extension serves some 60,000 Alaskans annually and provides a critical link between Alaska’s diverse people and communities to interpret and extend relevant research-based knowledge in an understandable and usable form.

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