

AURORA

Class notes and in memoriam

Submissions received October 2022 through
March 2023



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UAF faculty, staff and alumni participate in the Golden Days Parade July 23, 2022. The 2023 parade is slated for July 15, 2023. UAF photo by Eric Engman. Other photos courtesy of alumni unless otherwise noted.



Jim Perry, left, and Tark Tarkiainen

Jim Perry '71 and Richard "Tark" Tarkiainen '70 recently met up in Abbotsford, British Columbia, for a visit while Tark and his wife were in town to see a Boston Bruins game.

Jim played and coached for the UAF hockey team from 1966 to 1970. He retired from the Abbotsford

school district, having reached the position of superintendent.

Tark was named to the Alaska State Hockey Association Hall of Fame in August 2020. He retired from a teaching career that included serving as the West Valley High School hockey coach in Fairbanks.



Mike Sfraga

Michael Sfraga '84, '97 has been nominated by President Joe Biden to serve as the first Arctic ambassador, the White House announced Feb. 13, 2023.

Biden created the ambassador-at-large position for the Arctic region in August. According to the U.S. State Department, the Arctic ambassador will "advance U.S. policy in the Arctic, engage with

counterparts in Arctic and non-Arctic nations as well as Indigenous groups, and work closely with domestic stakeholders, including state, local, and tribal governments, businesses, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, other federal government agencies and Congress."

Mike earned a Ph.D. in geography and Northern studies from UAF. He serves as the chair of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, where he advises the president and Congress on research and policy related to the Arctic. He also is on the Scientific Advisory Council of the Finnish Institute for International Affairs.

[Read more about Mike's appointment.](#)



Nicole Hallingstad

Nicole Hallingstad '89 is the newly elected chair of the

American Indian Cancer Foundation.

Nicole, who is Tlingit and Norwegian, is from Petersburg, Alaska. She owns the management consulting firm A&A Solutions and works in Anchorage. She has been on the board since 2018 and is a two-time cancer survivor.

“The mission of AICAF is personally resonant to me as a survivor, and so important,” said Nicole. “It is an honor to serve AICAF’s mission to reduce cancer burdens from our families.”



Jeremy Johnson

Jeremy Johnson '03 was named president and CEO of the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and began work on Dec. 1, 2022.

"I am excited to join a dedicated group of professionals who have a shared goal of making a positive impact in our community," Jeremy said. "Fairbanks is my home, and it is an honor and a

privilege to work with the talented chamber staff, business and community leaders, and all of the current and future members to advance the business advocacy efforts of the chamber.”

Jeremy’s selection ended a five-month search process facilitated by a seven-member committee of business and community leaders.

Jeremy is a born-and-raised Fairbanksan and has spent the last 16 years in public service in various positions, from advising and assisting local governments to conducting elections. He holds a degree in political science from UAF. He received several Governor’s Denali Peak Performance Awards for his service from 2009 to 2015.

“I look forward to seeing familiar faces at the weekly business luncheons and welcoming new or returning members,” Jeremy said.

[Read more about Jeremy.](#)



Susan McKenzie

Susan McKenzie '05 was appointed as commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development by Gov. Mike Dunleavy in February 2022.

Susan earned a master's degree in language and literacy with a reading endorsement from UAF. She has taught in Fairbanks, Utqiagvik and Glennallen. She has most recently been superintendent of the Gaston School District in Oregon.

[Read more about Susan.](#)



Victoria Denning

Victoria Denning '06 has been named to the 2023 class of Alaska's Top Forty Under 40, sponsored by the Alaska Journal of Commerce.

Victoria is the chief administrative officer and a senior vice president at Denali State Bank, where she has worked since 2012. She serves on the UAF Board of Advisors.

Victoria earned a bachelor's degree in foreign languages with a minor in political science from UAF in 2006. She was a UAF scholarship athlete for volleyball during the 2001-2002 season.

Victoria's family is rich with UAF alumni. Her husband **Shannon Denning '05**, brother **Jeffrey Kilgore '03** and both parents, **Bill Kilgore '77** and **Cheryl Kilgore '79, '06**, are also UAF graduates.



Wendie MacNaughton

Wendie MacNaughton '07 has been named to the 2023 class of Alaska's Top Forty Under 40, sponsored by the Alaska Journal of Commerce.

Wendie is the external affairs manager for Northern Star Resources Ltd., the owner and operator of Pogo Mine. She also co-owns Blue Moose Storage in Fairbanks.

Wendie was brought to Alaska as a military transplant in 1991 and later graduated from UAF. Wendie participates on several industry boards and committees, including the Resource Development Council for Alaska, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, Council of Alaska Producers and Alaska Miners Association. Wendie is a travel enthusiast, but her roots remain planted in Fairbanks with her teenage son.

Robert Strick '07, '22 has been named to the 2023 class of Alaska's Top Forty Under 40, sponsored by the Alaska Journal of Commerce. He is the southwestern Alaska manager for the Federal Aviation Administration.



X'unei Lance Twitchell

X'unei Lance Twitchell '10 was nominated for an Emmy for his work on "Molly of Denali."

X'unei is a writer and advisor for the animated PBS Kids program. The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences nominated the program in two categories in the first annual Children's & Family Emmy Awards. It was not among the winners announced Dec. 10 at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre in Los Angeles.

“Molly of Denali” is the first nationally distributed children’s show in the United States to feature a lead character who is Alaska Native.

“It is such an honor to be part of an incredible team that works on ‘Molly of Denali,’” X’unei said. “At its inception, the show has involved Indigenous peoples at the creative levels, at first under the guidance of creative producer Princess Johnson, and then Yatibaey Evans. There are many gifted Indigenous writers in the team, and they continue to inspire my creativity.”

[Read more about X’unei’s nomination.](#)



Harlee Harvey.

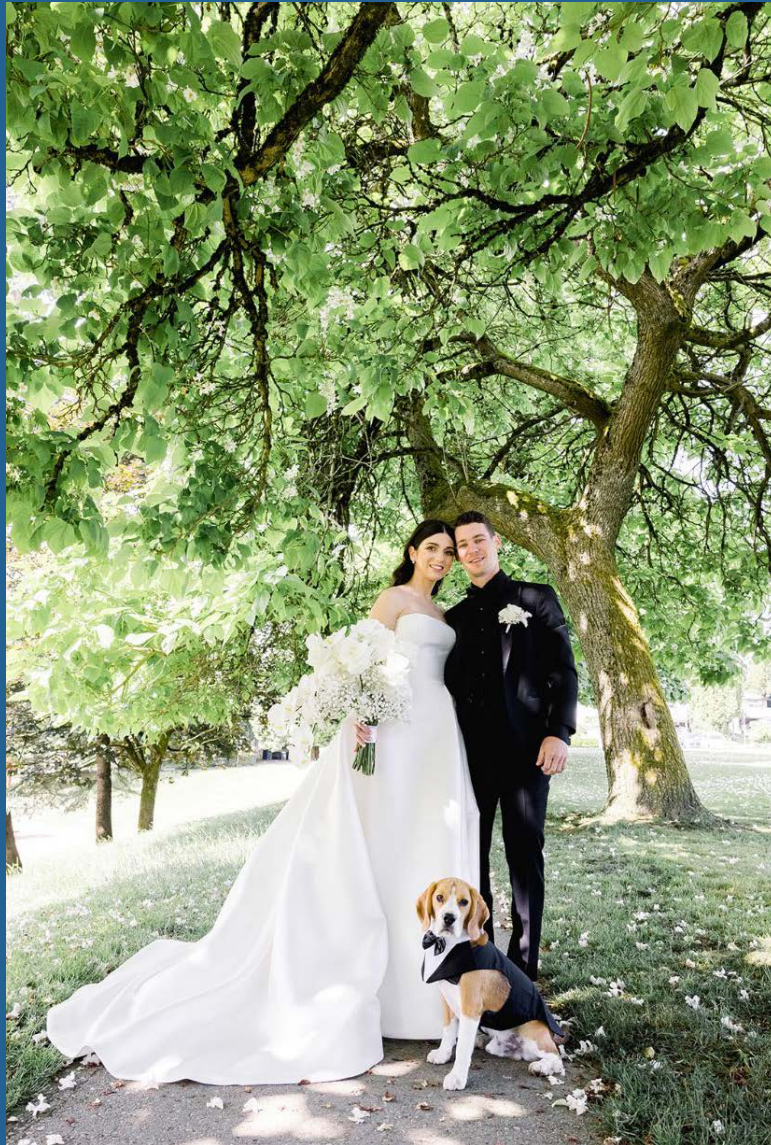
**Harlee Harvey '14 was named
2023 Alaska Teacher of the
Year.**

Harlee is a graduate of UAF and the American College of Education and has been teaching at Tikiq̄aq School in the North Slope Borough School District since 2014. She has taught both first and fifth grade.

Harlee has been involved with numerous staff development programs and extracurricular activities for students, including the Inupiaq Spelling Bee and Battle of the Books. She is a Mapkuk mentor for the North Slope Borough School District's cultural curriculum project.

Harlee's classroom environment and instruction is centered on culturally responsive practices. Her peers commend her for her knowledge and respect of the Inupiaq culture. Similarly, her decision to make Point Hope her home and become involved in the community outside of the classroom has helped earn her respect and strengthened her connection with students.

[Read more about Harlee's award.](#)



Top: Brandon Morley skates for TSV Peissenberg in Bavaria, Germany, in 2020. Bottom: Olivia and Brandon Morley, with dog Murphy, gather for a wedding photo at the Swaneset Bay Golf Club in Vancouver, British Columbia, in summer 2022.

Brandon Morley '16, '17 is the new player agent and advisor for the western Canadian region with Newport Sports Management in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Formerly a team captain of the Alaska Nanooks, Brandon played professional hockey in Germany for three years.

After retiring from hockey, he joined Elite Level Development as the director of player development. He was also an on-ice trainer for National Hockey League players Matt Barzal, Ryan Nugen-Hopkins and Connor Bedard.

In summer 2022, he married Olivia.



Photo courtesy of DOT&PF

Katherine Keith

Katherine Keith '20 was named deputy commissioner of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in January.

"It is my honor to serve the people of the state of Alaska in this new role," Katherine said in a news release. "As a team, we will focus on maximizing the once-in-a-generation opportunity presented by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and create a resilient, equitable and sustainable transportation system."

Katherine will oversee a wide variety of multimodal transportation programs focusing on safety, economic vitality, resiliency and

sustainability. She will lead the department's community engagement efforts and organizational teaming initiatives.

Katherine earned an interdisciplinary bachelor's degree in renewable energy engineering from UAF. She is an author, dog musher and endurance athlete.



AlexAnna Salmon

AlexAnna Salmon '20 has been named to the 2023 class of Alaska's Top Forty Under 40, sponsored by the Alaska Journal of Commerce.

AlexAnna is president of the Igiugig Village Council and is a partner and program director for Bristol Bay sustainable communities with the Alaska Venture Fund.

She holds a master's degree in rural development from UAF.

[Read more about AlexAnna.](#)



Kimberly Kivvaq Pikok

**Kimberly Kivvaq Pikok '21 has
been honored for her
conservation efforts by the
Explorers Club.**

The international organization, which is dedicated to the advancement of field exploration and scientific inquiry, honored Kimberly in February as one of its "50 People Changing the World That the World Needs to Know About."

Kimberly is researching seasonal changes in Utqiaġvik's spring whaling season by uplifting Indigenous knowledge gathered from hunters and whalers through interviews, a film project and the Alaska Arctic Observatory and Knowledge Hub database.

She graduated from UAF in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology. She is continuing as an interdisciplinary studies graduate student in UAF's Tamamta Fellowship program, which combines Indigenous and Western knowledge in fisheries and marine science research.

"I can't imagine that anyone embarks on a career in wildlife biology or any conservation-focused field for recognition and awards, because it's the results we achieve and the difference that we make that matter most," Kimberly said in a UAF news release. "Everyone in the community are stewards because we do this work for our people, communities, the next generations, the animals, the land and our culture."

Ian Ludwig '22 is a full-time real estate agent in Fairbanks and member of the National Association of Realtors.

"This work has been exactly what I was looking for," Ian said. "I graduated with a B.A. focus in finance with the intention of becoming a financial advisor. As a real estate agent, I have had the opportunity to offer a different side of financial advising – helping individuals to purchase homes. I have helped several friends of mine purchase their first homes – a process that has been incredibly gratifying and rewarding. I look forward to the future and am excited to be starting my career here locally!"





Join us for Nanook Rendezvous 2023!

The UAF Alumni Association will host a ceremony to present its annual awards during the Nanook Rendezvous alumni reunion on July 13, 2023. Educator **Brianna Gray '11, '12** will receive the Distinguished Alumnus Award, which recognizes accomplishments in business and professional life. Former legislator **Adam Wool '88** will receive the William R. Cashen

Service Award, which honors outstanding service to the university and its alumni association. We hope you'll join us!

*Background photo caption: **John Knoke '92**, stands with Nook while celebrating his 30th reunion at the Nanook Night Goldpanners baseball game during the Nanook Rendezvous alumni reunion July 22, 2022.*





In memoriam

[View a list of alumni and friends whose passage has been shared with us since the previous issue of Aurora.](#)



[Aurora home](#)