UAF held seven commencement ceremonies this spring, at the main campus in Fairbanks, the Bristol Bay Campus in Dillingham, Chukchi Campus in Kotzebue, Kuskokwim Campus in Bethel, Northwest Campus in Nome, and at Interior-Aleutians Campus learning centers in Circle and Tok. Approximately 1,274 students received 1,360 certificates or degrees at the 91st commencement ceremonies, including 52 doctoral degrees, a new record.

The Alaska Volcano Observatory marked its 25th anniversary in April. A cooperative program of the U.S. Geological Survey, the UAF Geophysical Institute, and the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, AVO monitors and studies Alaska’s volcanoes. Observations and warnings from AVO have improved global understanding of how volcanoes work.

Georgeson Botanical Garden Director Pat Holloway was a speaker at the International Peony Summit held in April in Luoyang, China. Top peony researchers from Italy, Israel, China and other countries were among the presenters. She also visited Henan University of Science and Technology, powerhouse for the peony industry in Luoyang, where she discussed research and industry development and potential cooperative research opportunities.

Alaska 4-H leader Barbara Hoedel received the 4-H Salute to Excellence Outstanding Lifetime Volunteer award, the fourth time in five years the award has gone to an Alaskan. A certified therapeutic riding instructor, she recruits 4-H volunteers and their horses to offer a riding program for special-needs children. Hoedel, who lives in Kodiak, has been a 4-H volunteer for 34 years.

This year’s Usibelli Award recipients are Jonathan Rosenberg, professor of political science, for teaching; Jeffrey Freymueller, professor of geophysics, Geophysical Institute, for research; and Catherine Cahill, associate professor of chemistry, Geophysical Institute and the College of Natural Science and Mathematics, for service. The Emil Usibelli Distinguished Teaching, Research and Public Service Awards are UAF’s most prestigious. These three $10,000 awards are presented to individuals who display extraordinary excellence in teaching, research and service.

Bente Heller claimed UAF’s first NCAA championship in swimming, winning the title in the women’s 100-meter backstroke. Heller, a junior from Hamburg, Germany, also tied for third in the 100-meter freestyle and seventh in the 200 free; she is now a nine-time All-American. The team named her the 2012 – 2013 MVP and gave her the Attitude Award.

Groundbreaking ceremonies took place March 30 for the Wood Center expansion and the new College of Engineering and Mines building. The 34,000-square-foot, $30.7 million Wood Center expansion project is being financed by a private partner who will lease the building back to the university. The project is slated for completion in fall 2014. The new, 120,000-square-foot engineering building will provide modern classroom and laboratory space for engineering-related academic and research programs. The 2013 Alaska Legislature allocated $15 million for the project, which should be enough to keep construction moving through the next season.

The UA Museum of the North opened “Denali Legacy: 100 Years on the Mountain” May 18. To tell the story of the first ascent of North America’s tallest mountain, museum staff tracked down and borrowed diaries of all four climbers who made it to the top in 1913 — the first time they’ve all been together in the same place in a century. The exhibit runs through Jan. 25, 2014.

Summer Sessions is sponsoring Discover Alaska, a lecture series on Wednesday evenings through Aug. 14 in the new Margaret Murie building auditorium. Lecture subjects are extremely diverse, ranging from glaciology and the aurora to poetry and 25 years of cartooning in Alaska.

The Institute of Arctic Biology celebrates 50 years Aug. 22 – 23 with academic seminars, social gatherings and building tours. IAB was founded in 1963 by the Board of Regents of the University of Alaska with Laurence Irving, a pioneer in the field of comparative physiology, as the founding director.
Anna Liljedahl, research assistant professor with UAF’s International Arctic Research Center and Institute of Northern Engineering, works with Will Wright, of the Delta Soil and Water Conservation District, to collect snow samples from the surface of Jarvis Glacier, about 45 miles south of Delta Junction. They are investigating future streamflow, as bridges and road networks can be affected by floods, and how climate change may affect surface wetness in the lowlands.