

AURORA



**Alumni awardees
give back to Alaska
and UAF**

By Theresa Bakker

Above: From left, DeLys Cooks, Jim Culley and Allison Kelliher received the UAF Alumni Association's 2022 awards. Photos courtesy of alumni unless otherwise noted.

**The University of
Alaska Fairbanks
Alumni
Association will
host a ceremony
to present its
annual awards
during the
Nanook
Rendezvous
alumni reunion in
July 2022.**

The 2022 awards acknowledge in part the challenges that alumni in the health care profession have overcome during the pandemic.

Dr. Allison Kelliher '01 and **DeLys Cooks '06, '07** both will receive a Distinguished Alumnus Award, which recognizes accomplishments in business and professional life.

Jim Culley '93, a longtime supporter of the College of Business and Security Management, will receive the William R. Cashen Service Award. The award honors outstanding service to the university and its alumni association.



Dr. Allison Kelliher '01

Kelliher is the first medical doctor to also be recognized as a tribal doctor, having worked as a traditional healer in a clinical setting.

Kelliher, originally from Nome, is Koyukon Athabascan.

“My studies in traditional medicine began when I was a child of four,” she said. “My mother’s

family had experience in healing. My great-grandmother is a medicine person. I was able to nurture my skills by walking on their backs.”

In addition to her practice as a board-certified family and integrative medicine doctor, Dr. Kelliher directs the American Indian Collaborative Research Network and serves as the director at large for the Association of American Indian Physicians.

She received her bachelor’s degree in Indigenous medicine from UAF, graduated from the University of Washington School of Medicine in 2005 and completed the Alaska Family Medicine Residency in 2009.

“Dr. Kelliher is an essential bridge between traditional medicine and Alaska Native communities’ approach to well-being,” said Kelly Drew, director of the Center for Transformative Research in Metabolism at the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology.

Dr. Kelliher began her career in the field of neuroscience while working on Arctic ground squirrels, analyzing their cerebrospinal fluid

samples and assisting with fieldwork surgeries. This helped to lay the groundwork to develop drugs to help treat heart attack and stroke victims. During medical school, she identified the need to promote vaccine awareness in rural Idaho and then held a series of community events.

“Although I have a background in neuroscience, I am most honored to have studied with practitioners of ethnomedicines, including Alaska Native, Native American, First Nations, Native Hawaiian, Ayurvedic, Thai traditional medicine, traditional Chinese medicine and Western herbalism,” she said.

Currently based in North Dakota, Dr. Kelliher is an instructor at both the University of Alaska Anchorage and the University of Washington, where this year she is lecturing on the concept of decolonizing medicine. She regularly visits Alaska, including the village of Nulato where she was honored to be welcomed the last time she was there as a member of the tribe. The opportunity to learn from her people and have access to Indigenous ways of knowing is what brought her to UAF in the first place.

“UAF gave me the opportunity to work on my bachelor’s degree in chemistry through an interdisciplinary approach that included behavioral psychology,” she said. “The connections through my teachers and mentors and their enthusiasm involving traditional values allowed me to succeed. I learned that traditional Alaska Native views and perspectives are valuable and can benefit us all.”



DeLys Cooks '06, '07

Cooks has always known her purpose — caring for others.

Her family arrived at Fort Wainwright when she was three years old. She credits her parents' love and their decision to stay in the community of Fairbanks for allowing her to flourish in the medical field. Now she is empowered to give back to the community.

“I was drawn to medicine at a young age and always knew I wanted to be a nurse.”

Her journey began as an intern at Bassett Army Community Hospital, where she worked with military doctors in internal medicine and procedures. She later attended UAF. She earned a bachelor’s degree in sociology and certificates in medical assisting and medical/dental reception. While waiting for entry into the nursing program at UA Anchorage, Cooks worked for the Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and became a certified nurse assistant in 2005.

Cooks worked at Denali Center and later transitioned to the emergency department, working as an emergency room technician.

Darryl Lewis '88 first met Cooks when she was in high school. She was soft-spoken and willing to work behind the scenes, where she would make her presence known.

“In that capacity, she’s the very same person now,” Lewis said. “I am honored to recommend her for the UAFAA Distinguished Alumnus Award, as she is everything it represents.”

In 2016, Cooks completed her bachelor's in nursing, and last year she completed a master's program to become an advanced practitioner as a certified nurse midwife. All said, she has worked as a nurse in the Fairbanks area for more than 15 years. She has provided care for mothers and babies throughout the pandemic.

"The last two years have not been easy," she said. "Staff shortages, politics, separation of family and casualties of exposure to the COVID virus are just a few challenges that have affected the community."

Cooks has mentored high school students in the medical explorer program. She is a new member of the NAACP health committee, where she plans to represent and help educate minorities and normalize health care.



Jim Culley '93

Culley grew up in an Army family, the oldest of four boys.

“We were always Alaska residents, as my father had graduated from high school in Wrangell before attending college at Whitman, where he met my mother,” he said. “After they graduated, my father was drafted for Vietnam and served in the Army for 27 years.”

Culley's family was stationed at Fort Wainwright from 1975 to 1980. His late father, **James R. Culley '78**, earned his MBA from UAF. This is also when Culley discovered a love of hockey.

After Alaska, they moved to Nuremberg, Germany, where Culley continued to play hockey. Then came Texas and Illinois, where he graduated from high school before returning to Fairbanks to attend UAF. Here he met his wife and fellow alum **Emily (Worhatch) Culley '97**.

He earned his Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in finance from the UAF School of Management, now the College of Business and Security Management. After graduation, Culley began his career with National Bank of Alaska and entered the management training program, leading to assignments in Bethel, King Salmon, Kenai, Wrangell and then back in Fairbanks after Wells Fargo purchased NBA.

Culley worked for Tanana Chiefs Conference as an internal auditor and returned to banking to work at Northrim as the Fairbanks commercial loan unit manager.



Clockwise from top: Jim on his graduation day with then-fiance Emily; Jim and his wife Emily at their daughter's volleyball team senior night at North Pole High School; Jim coaching his son Jimmy's youth hockey team.



Clockwise from top: Jim on his graduation day with then-fiance Emily; Jim and his wife Emily at their daughter's volleyball team senior night at North Pole High School; Jim coaching his son Jimmy's youth hockey team.

“In 2019, I made the transition to Mt. McKinley Bank where I am a senior vice president and commercial lender,” he said. “My wife and I have two children – Jimmy, who is 24, and Grace, who is 18 and plans to attend UAF in fall 2022. My mother and father both retired here, and all three of my brothers and their families live in Fairbanks.”

Culley has been a dedicated UAF and CBSM volunteer throughout his career. He attended the college’s Etiquette Seminar and Dinner for several years and has lent his expertise to the Arctic Innovation Competition. In addition, he has served on the Business Leader of the Year event steering committee.

“Jim is a wonderful ambassador for our university in assisting students and supporting our school,” said Mark Herrmann, CBSM dean. “Alumni like Jim are essential to our success.”

[Register for the Nanook Rendezvous alumni reunion awards ceremony.](#)



Nook joins **Cindy Wright '88**, at left, and Theresa Bakker to cheer for UAF at the Golden Days Grande Parade during the 2021 Nanook Rendezvous weekend. The annual UAF reunion will be held on parade weekend again this year. Wright is a former chair of the UAF Alumni Association, where Bakker serves as executive director.





[Aurora home](#)