

Corporate life, Kobuk roots

By LJ Evans

All the years she was growing up, **Helvi Sandvik, '86**, and her family spent summers in the village of Kiana, on Alaska's Kobuk River, and the school year in Glenview, Ill., a Chicago suburb. She became an adult with feet planted solidly in both worlds, as the Anchorage-based CEO of a major Alaska corporation with close ties to her family's rural background.

"It was a Huck Finn kind of life" during summers in Kiana, Helvi said. Every year she and her brothers and sisters fished and hunted and explored all the riffles and eddies of the Kobuk. "They were wonderful, wonderful adventures." Although she had exposure to different facets of the world because of the time in Illinois, Helvi said Kiana has always been the place she considers home.

"My parents broke their necks to be sure we went back and forth every year," she said, so that connections with Kiana and her mother's Inupiat roots were maintained.

Helvi's father was **Peter Olaf Sandvik**, the son of Matanuska Valley colonists. He completed two bachelor's degrees at the University of Alaska, in geology in 1950 and mining engineering in 1951, and went on to earn a doctorate in geology at Stanford. At UA he met his future wife, **Ruth Blankenship** from Kiana, who in 1951 also graduated from UA with a bachelor of arts degree. Peter traveled a lot in his career



Helvi participated in the June 2004 launching ceremony of the tug Avik in Kotzebue.

but he, Ruth and their seven children spent a portion of every year in Kiana at the Blankenship Trading Post alongside the Kobuk, which was owned and operated by Ruth and her cousin Rob Blankenship. Blankenship died in 2001 but Ruth runs the trading post to this day.

Several times every summer, Rob would pilot a barge and the *Helvi Kay* — the trading post's small tug — down the river to Kotzebue to get supplies. When the children were sufficiently well behaved, they got to go along.

"Those were just heavenly trips," Helvi said. They would wait for the weather to clear so they could safely cross the sound to get into Kotzebue, which to the children seemed like the big city.

"Rob would let us buy *Archie* comic books. That was not useful reading as far as my mother was concerned, so we would hide out in the bow of the tug to read our comics," Helvi laughed.

College choices helped define the path

Helvi chose Kalamazoo College in Michigan for her bachelor's degree in economics, which is where she met Kelly Culver, her future husband. The couple moved to Alaska, where Helvi went to work for Maniilaq Association. Helvi felt she needed to continue her education, but she wasn't sure if she wanted to be a lawyer or go into business.

"I realized if I went to law school I'd have to leave Alaska," Helvi said, which helped tip her decision. She opted for a master's degree in business administration at UAF. Because of what her parents had told her about the school and the research she'd done, she knew she could get a good education there.

"Going to UAF allowed me to stay in the state, keep in touch with what was going on in Alaska and not feel as though I was missing things.

"It was the best decision I ever made."

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Nanooks on Facebook®

Some of you shared your fondest memories of UAF with us. Following are a few of the entries. Join the alumni association on Facebook and send in your UAF memories.

John T. Baldwin, '95, Kansas City, Mo.

"The small herd of moose that would bed down at night next to our back porch. The hissing of the snow, the wind blowing through the trees, that at the end of two years I could go anywhere in Fairbanks and run into someone I knew and we would stop and chat. Trips to Fred Meyer that lasted for hours, most of that time spent chatting with friends. The quiet of winter as my wife and I watched the lights dancing in the sky."



Merritt Helfferich, '66, Fairbanks, Alaska

"Fondest memories include helping to start the 'Hang the Dean' revolt in 1958.

"Turning the entire UA water supply green with Ernie Kaiser on St. Patrick's Day/Engineers Day.

"Following the utilidors to the steep tunnel slope under the water tower (now gone) next to the north side of Signers' Hall to the mining engineers' mine drift where the university's emergency disaster supplies were located, where one of the university wells was drilled, and where the most beautiful ice crystals would form by the entrance to the mine drift in winter.

"Being involved with the graduate students from the Geophysical Institute and their creative and sometimes wild ideas of interesting and funny things to do; being a jazz program announcer on the university station that preceded KUAC. It was KUOA.

"Meeting Ginny Wood and Celia Hunter in 1958.

"Graduation!

"English faculty member Joseph W. Meeker, his thoughtful, skilled instruction and his great book, *The Comedy of Survival*.

"Drinking with Otto Geist, Ivar Skarland and Magnus 'Rusty' Heurlin in the Malemute Saloon!

President's column

By Gail Phillips, '67

Spring brings hope and promise for Alaska and the university. The fall elections will bring new direction and we will work to make sure that funding for the university remains at the top of our Legislature's priorities.

The UAF Alumni Association remains very active in representing UAF in the community, at sporting events and in lobbying on its behalf. We are grateful for the regents' decision to place the UAF Life Sciences Classroom and Lab Facility at the top of the capital projects priority list. This project will provide excellent return on investment of Alaska's public dollars and will contribute significantly to Alaska's economic growth. We will continue our lobbying efforts in Juneau during the legislative session.

For those alumni in the Pacific Northwest, I want to let you know that your association is planning a Nanook reunion in Portland sometime in April. This will provide an opportunity to become more involved in student recruitment, mentoring and networking with old friends and alums. Please visit our website, www.uaf.edu/alumni/, for details. We look forward to meeting with many of our West Coast alumni during this visit.

In addition to the social activities of your association, we cannot lose sight of the main reason we stay involved, which is to make sure we have the best university system possible to provide the finest education opportunities for all students. We are looking forward to this year's commencement activities during the weekend of May 15 – 16. We wish all the best to those graduates who are working on their final studies at UAF.

"Being on the UAF Fire Department and once in 1959, while rescuing roommate Chuck Vernon from overindulgence in Tommy's Elbow Room, on the way back to UAF on College Road, discovering a house fire, calling the UAF Fire Department, and then keeping a corner

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of the almost completely burned-out house burning until dawn because it was 40 below and we needed to keep warm.

"The aurora borealis and the crunch of cold snow as one walked."

**David Kingsland, '88, '94,
Seward, Alaska**

"How about sneaking into the utilidor tunnels that ran underground to every building on campus. Anyone else been to that huge fall-out shelter underneath the parking lot by Eielson Building???"



Sean LeMay, Matric., Huntsville/Decatur, Ala.



"There are far too many great memories of UAF and Alaska in general to enumerate but one of my favorite things about freshman year was 'foot-skiing' from Bartlett to the chow hall for breakfast and dinner! Who needs Breckenridge when you have a frozen hill and frozen shoes?"

"Plus the best ab workout ever every time one of your friends busted. ☺"

Ted Locke, '97, Philadelphia, Penn.

"I remember DJing one of those dances at the Hess Rec center. It was a fundraiser for Nerland. We had two 3'x6' bass cabinets (two speakers apiece), four 4'x2' mid-range cabinets (three mid-range speakers and two tweeters), and various others from KSUA and around campus. I think it was during the winter of '95.

"We had the sound cranked and the floor packed so much that we were getting complaints from people on the third and fourth floors of the surrounding dorms. ☺ We also had to constantly push the stacks of speakers forward because they had a tendency to 'dance' backwards.

"If I remember the cash draw that night was about \$5,000. After paying the rental bill for the speakers we were left over with about \$4,500. It was supposedly one of the largest dances in that place."



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Jennifer Sarah Lombard, '98, Anchorage, Alaska

"One thing that comes to mind is the percussion students' drumming sessions outside near the Great Hall. Whatever I was doing, I had to stop and listen whenever they played.

"Also, spending many hours in the pottery studio is among some of my favorite memories of UAF, and the friends I met at Nerland Hall and through Zeta Mu."

Margot Monhollen Maynard, '97, Youngstown, Ohio

"Ditto on the Fred Meyer memory! Walking, nay, JOGGING up to the West Ridge to make classes because the shuttle never seemed to run at precisely the right time. The way Denali looked on a clear day from the far side of the West Ridge. Classes with Dr. Cornwall and his frequent segues to war stories. The jalapeño burger at the cafe. Great friends. Rappelling off of Lathrop Hall. So many more!"



Tracy Shringarpure, '02, Fishers, Ind.

"Wow. So many crazy adventures..."

"Sliding down the hill from MBS to Lola on stolen dinner trays.

"Tweaking the elevator in Skarland to get down to the basement.

"The bonfires in the fall and fruit toss in the spring.

"Dragging old couches onto the lawns to chill in t-shirt and shorts when the temps hit 32.

"Tossing boiling water into -40/-50F air to watch instant snow!"

"Blowing bubbles in the same temps to make solid soap bubbles.

"Getting up super early to trudge to the KSUA building only to find the last DJs left and having to wait for a security person to open the building up."



Save the date!

**September
23 – 25, 2010**

1950s



UAF photo by Todd Paris.

Angayuq Oscar Kawagley, '58, received a 2009 National Indian Education Association Lifetime Achievement Award. The NIEA works to increase educational opportunities and resources for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian

students while protecting cultural and linguistic traditions.

1970s

Rich Love, '74 — "I graduated with an associate in electronics technology. I worked for Stanford Research Institute at the Chatanika radar site for a couple of years after graduating. Moved away from Alaska in 1975. I was a field service engineer for McDonnell Douglas in Seattle for many years. Have been running my own software company out of my home for 20 years now, writing Macintosh software (www.MacWise.com). I spent the last six months learning to program the iPhone and wrote an application called 'Say it & Mail it' (www.SayitMailit.com). It is getting great reviews (www.tuaw.com/2009/09/17/say-it-and-mail-it-voice-memos-on-steroids/). Married to wife



Karen, Matric., '74, for 42 years. Karen was with me at UoFA also. She worked for Glen Stanley at the Geophysical Institute."

Terese Kaptur, '76, '86, is the executive director of the Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival.

Judy Fowler-Morris, '78, received a 2009 BP Teachers of Excellence award.

Galen Johnson, '79, '02, was selected by Fairbanks-area engineers as the 2009 Engineer of the Year. He is the president of the local chapter of the Alaska Society of Professional Engineers and coordinates the construction management program at the Tanana Valley Campus. He has more than 30 years' experience in construction contracting in Alaska.



1980s

Philip André Layral, '81, is the executive director for the Alaska Association of Secondary School Principals. He worked 23 years for the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, serving as a teacher, aquatics coordinator, athletic director, assistant principal and middle school principal before retiring in 2000. André served 10 years on the AASSP Board of Directors and is a past president of both AASSP and the Alaska Council of School Administrators.

Diann Darnall, '82, received one gold and three silver medals in table tennis at the Huntsman World Senior Games in Utah last year and competed in the National Senior Games in San Francisco in August 2009, placing second in the women's double table tennis competition in her age category.



Great Alaskan Outhouse Experience by Craig Buchanan. Image courtesy of the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce.

Craig Buchanan, '83, was named the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce 2010 Artist of the Year for his piece *Great Alaskan Outhouse Experience*. Born in Philadelphia, Penn., Craig has been a resident of Ester, Alaska, since 1976. His assemblages of natural and industrial materials have been in group exhibitions at the Fairbanks Arts Association's Bear Gallery, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, other galleries and museums nationwide, and he opened an art exhibit named "Constructs" at the Annex Gallery in Ester in September. His works are displayed in the UA Museum of the North Rose Berry Alaska Art Gallery and numerous local businesses, restaurants and galleries throughout the Interior. He has been featured on the History Channel series *Tougher in Alaska*. He is the owner of Small Horizons, which has provided local businesses with potted-plant leasing and maintenance for interior spaces since 1982.

Theresa John, '83, '92, was selected as one of the first two recipients of the Mellon Dissertation Fellowship. The fellowship program was established through a \$700,000, five-year pledge to UAF from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support Native students in the dissertation-writing phase of their doctoral programs. Her dissertation reviewed

the results of her ethnographic research on Yup'ik dance in Southwestern Alaska.

Kathleen Norris, '86, was hired in 2009 as an assistant professor of educational leadership at Plymouth State University.

Lisa Hendrix, '87, recently celebrated the publication of her sixth and seventh novels, *Immortal Warrior* and *Immortal Outlaw*.

Jeff Roach, '87, is a lieutenant colonel in the Alaska Army National Guard and served as the U.S. Army aviation task force commander during a one-year deployment to Kosovo. He led 160 soldiers from Alaska and Maryland providing airlift and aero-medical evacuation throughout Kosovo to U.S. and coalition forces with a fleet of UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters. Jeff has been the commander of the 1/207th Aviation Battalion since January 2008 and has served more than 28 years in the Alaska Army National Guard.

1990s

Wayne Don, '94, '04, was named to the 2009 Native American Top 40 under 40 list by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development. He deployed to Afghanistan in September 2009 as a member of the Alaska National Guard to embed with the Mongolian army and serve as an advisor and liaison for the Mongolians serving with the American command.



Alaska Army National Guard Maj. Wayne Don (right) with Maj. Serod Boldbaatar of the Mongolian army.

Larry Ehnert, '95, received a 2009 BP Teachers of Excellence award.

Karen Max Kelly, '96, is the executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.

Julene Abrams, '97, was selected by Fairbanks-area engineers in February 2009 as Young Engineer of the Year. She is employed at Eielson Air Force Base as the development chief for facilities.

Jane Parrish, '97, competed in the National Senior Games in San Francisco in August 2009, placing fifth in the women's double table tennis competition in her age category. Jane also placed second in the

women's open title in the Fall Fun Open Table Tennis Tournament! in September 2009 at UAF.

Jordan Lewis, '99, was selected as one of the first two recipients of the Mellon Dissertation Fellowship. The fellowship program was established through a \$700,000, five-year pledge to UAF from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support Native students in the dissertation-writing phase of their doctoral programs. His studies focus on gerontology and circumpolar health issues in rural Alaska.

2000s



Dana Hanselman, '00, was honored by President Obama with a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers. Dana is an Alaska fisheries scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The award is the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on outstanding scientists and engineers in the early stages of their careers.

Valene Dunn, '01, married Rodney Burton Sept. 12, 2009.

Susan Vogt, '02, earned her certification as an erosion and sediment control professional in February 2007. She is self-employed as an environmental consultant.

Robert Catena, '03, completed a postdoctorate fellowship through Harvard University at the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety in Hopkinton, Mass., in biomechanics research. His wife, **Laurel (Yauchzee), Matric.**, completed an American Culinary Institute program in Boston and is a certified pastry chef. Robert and Laurel moved to Southern California where Robert is a biomechanist with Vector Scientific Inc., a research and forensic consulting firm specializing in biomechanics and accident reconstruction.



Alice Velsko, '04, received her degree in veterinary medicine from Washington State University in May 2009.

Panika Dillon, '05, graduated with her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College in 2009. Her poetry has been published in the *Copper Nickel*, at www.spindlezine.com, at www.death-metal-poetry.com, and will soon appear in *Oranges & Sardines* from Poets and Artists.

Bradley Oleson, '05, signed an overseas basketball contract with Real Madrid in September 2009. His high school basketball jersey, #23, was retired at North Pole High School.



UAF photo by Todd Paris



UAF photo by Todd Paris

Katey Walter Anthony, '06, was named one of *National Geographic's* Emerging Explorers for 2009. The Emerging Explorers Program recognizes young scientists, photographers and storytellers who are making a difference early in their careers. Each of the 10 recipients in 2009 received \$10,000 to assist further research and exploration.

Helen Clark, '07, received a 2009 BP Teachers of Excellence award.



Got job changes, family changes, awards to brag about, or do you want to become a member of your alumni association? Visit www.uaf.edu/alumni/ to stay connected. Tell us your good news and we will publish it in the next issue of *Aurora* or the *Alumnus* newsletter. Send photos, too!

In memoriam

Katherine Ann Abel, former staff member, Nov. 24, 2009, Fairbanks

Gay Lynn Alexander, '81, Jan. 11, 2010, Fairbanks

Patricia A. Andresen, director emerita, Jan. 16, 2010, Kailua, Hawaii

John Lindsay Antaki, '56, Nov. 14, 2009, Brattleboro, Vt.

Lucy A. Carlo, '82, Nov. 4, 2009, Fairbanks

Marjorie Kowalski Cole, '75, '80, Dec. 4, 2009, Ester

Leslie J. Conley, '52, Nov. 2, 2009, Knoxville, Tenn.

Thom DePace Wylie Gruenig, former staff member, Nov. 24, 2009, Fairbanks

Ellen J. Frank, former staff member, Dec. 22, 2009, Minto

Kathryn L. Gruenig, staff member, Nov. 24, 2009, Fairbanks

Linda J. Harris, former staff member, Dec. 17, 2009, Roann, Ind.

Robin Lamb, Matric., Dec. 17, 2009, Onancock, Va.

George William McGee, '49, Nov. 12, 2009, North Pole

Gerald Mohatt, CANHR director and psychology professor, Feb. 10, 2010, Fairbanks

Evelyn Stefansson Nef, '98, Dec. 10, 2009, Washington, D.C.

E. Bradford Phillips, '50, Nov. 23, 2009, Anchorage

Judith K. Redmond, '80, Oct. 18, 2009, Anchorage

Ronald Max Risch, '69, Dec. 21, 2009, Anchorage

Donald M. Schell, '64, '71, professor emeritus, Dec. 11, 2009, Australia

Candis Shannon, '75, '06, Nov. 11, 2009, Fairbanks

Kenneth Toovak, '03, Nov. 19, 2009, Barrow

James M. Walsh, '40, Dec. 15, 2009, Eastsound, Wash.

Kobuk roots, continued from page 23

While she was still taking classes toward the MBA, Helvi got a job with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in Fairbanks as a transportation planner. During her 12-year career there she served as the statewide director of aviation — responsible for development and maintenance for all of Alaska's airports — and as deputy commissioner. In 1995 she accepted a position as vice president of operations with NANA Development Corp., one of Alaska's largest and most successful Native corporations. She has been president of the corporation since 1999.

A young widow

Helvi's husband, Kelly Culver, died of heart failure in 1999, leaving her a single parent to three children; the youngest was only 3 years old at the time.

"I work very hard to balance my life," Helvi told an *Anchorage Daily News* reporter in 2004. "My husband, prior to his death, was the parent who stayed at home and so when I became a widow, I really had to step back and say, [...] how do I continue to succeed in my profession [...] and still make sure I provide the proper parenting responsibility? So I work very hard to make sure that every free moment that I have is devoted to my children."

She still spends as much time as she can in Kiana, helping her mother run the trading post. **Bob Marovelli, '50**, was friends with Peter Sandvik while they were students at UA. He has maintained a close relationship with the family, and after Peter's death in 1995 he started going to Kiana part of every year to help Ruth run the trading post.

"I help with the 'donkey' jobs," Marovelli said.



Left: Helvi and her father, Peter Sandvik. Helvi's older sister **Kara, '85**, is peeking out the window behind them. Right: Helvi, fifth from the right, on the shore of the Kobuk River with Kiana childhood friends and her sisters Kara and Robin, third and fourth from the left.



Extended family

Helvi appreciates the contributions Marovelli and other UAF alumni have made to her family.

"My parents both graduated from the University of Alaska, and my entire life there were these very accomplished people in my life who they met in college," Helvi said. "One good example is Bob Marovelli. He's just one of many people my parents met at UAF that were lifelong friends, all of whom achieved significant things in their professional lives."

"It seems that the University of Alaska was good at attracting and developing talent," Helvi said.

Marovelli in turn tells admiring stories about Helvi's abilities, like how she can expertly maneuver a large jet boat to haul visitors and supplies up and down the Kobuk. All the Sandvik children were taught as youngsters how to navigate the river. They were raised to be exceptionally self-sufficient and independent.

"When Helvi does something, it's all out. She just gets in that boat and goes," Marovelli said. "She juggles her NANA job, takes care of things in Kiana and at

the same time she is an excellent mother and role model for her children."

"I went to an excellent high school in Illinois," Helvi said. "But it wasn't like Kiana where absolutely everybody knows your name. You could run into somebody on the river and they knew you so well they could tell you your whole family tree. That leads to such a sense of belonging."

"I grew up with the comfort of knowing exactly who I am."



LJ Evans is a writer and editor for UAF Marketing and Communications.

Helvi Sandvik's honors and appointments

- ★ 2009 Alumni Achievement Award for Business and Professional Excellence, UAF Alumni Association
- ★ Chair, Seattle Branch Board of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco
- ★ Commissioner, U.S. Arctic Research Commission
- ★ Executive Committee Member, Alaska State Chamber of Commerce
- ★ Laureate, Junior Achievement Alaska Business Hall of Fame
- ★ Member, Anchorage Athena Society
- ★ Trustee, Aqqaluk Trust