

Edward K. Thomas

Accomplishments As President

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Listed below are some of the things that I am proud to have accomplished while serving as your President...

I. Changed the Tlingit Haida Central Council conventions from the Fall to April of each year

A. When conventions were in the fall, on election years the local delegate elections had to be held in the middle of the summer when people were trying to make a living.

- 1.** Elections were very light and some very qualified people could not run for delegate because they couldn't afford to miss fishing or working in the cannery.

II. Changed the Voter Registration system to where an 18 year old tribal enrollee was automatically eligible to participate in elections on their 18th birthday

A. The previous Registration system was an administrative nightmare.

- 1.** The files were poorly maintained and often the registration information was mixed with enrollment documents.

B. The enrollment requirement and then a voter registration system was a very duplicative system.

- 1.** Many people would register to vote and thought that this took care of the enrollment requirement.

III. Changed the indirect cost system from being based on salaries to total budgets

A. Dramatically reduced our indirect cost rate.

B. Lower indirect cost rates help to increase our ability to compete for new grants and foundation funding.

C. We also have an "on-site" rate and an "off-site" rate that increases our ability to fully collect indirect costs due to us.

IV. Negotiated the State of Alaska resumption of the Sandy Bay Fish Hatchery

A. The hatchery was costing the tribe an average of \$250,000 per year of its own money to operate.

B. Was able to get the State to liquidate a \$1.5 million debt for \$150,000.

C. I was able to get the US Forest Service to lift a requirement of restoring the hatchery site to its original condition.

- 1.** This would have cost the tribe nearly \$100,000 to complete.

V. Sold many money-losing building management operations in several communities

- A.** Yakutat
- B.** Haines
- C.** Klawock
- D.** Juneau

VI. Created an investment portfolio for our Tribal Trust Fund

- A.** Prior to that time the Bureau of Indian Affairs managed all of our Trust Fund by investing entirely in bonds.
- B.** Brought as much as 27% return by investing a portion of the portfolio in other investment vehicles.
- C.** Diversity in the portfolio not only increased earnings it also mitigated risk.
- D.** The fund has been preserved in down markets in both stock and bond investment instruments.

VII. Created the first written policy on managing and investing our Tribal Trust Fund

- A.** This policy ensures that standards are created and adhered to in managing our Tribal Trust Fund.
- B.** Prior to that time the issue of managing these funds was left to the whims of one person and managed entirely by the BIA.

VIII. Discontinued automatic salary increases

- A.** Prior to being elected as President, each and every employee would get an automatic salary increase once they finished another year with the tribe.
- B.** Now an employee gets a step increase for additional duties or additional skills brought about through training.
- C.** The automatic salary increases quickly took the tribe out of competitive contracting and competitive grants and made it impossible for the tribe to afford its employees.

IX. Discontinued “flex time” for employees

- A.** When I was first elected, employees were on flex time. This meant that they could choose to come to work later if they stayed later at the end of the day.
- B.** This turned into a situation where everybody came in late and left early.
- C.** Getting rid of this flex time not only standardized the work day but increased staff morale because the standardized workday is fair and impartial.
 - 1.** There are still positions within the tribe where employees are granted a waiver for special circumstances.

X. Fully computerized tribal operations

- A.** Our tribe was one of the first to implement a “mini-computer” system. This amounted to a single computer that had several stations.
- B.** We also became one of the first to switch to microcomputer tied into a network server.
- C.** Most Tlingit Haida Central Council employees are fully trained on the standard MS Office package and some other stand alone software packages.

XI. Created the Raymond Paddock, Jr. Major Medical Emergency Fund

- A.** This was the first Native program in Southeast Alaska set up to help fill the gap between what Indian Health Services provides to tribal citizens afflicted with major illnesses.
- B.** It assists tribal citizens even outside of our Southeast Alaska service area.

XII. Established and maintained the Native Issues Forum

- A.** This forum provides an opportunity for tribal citizens to hear reports or presentations on political issues important to them.
- B.** This forum serves as an opportunity to strengthen our tribe’s relationship with state legislators.

XIII. Applied for and received a State of Alaska gaming permit

- A.** Managed a pull-tab operation that generated thousands of dollars for our non-federal social contributions.
- B.** This was the major income for the Ray Paddock, Jr. Major Medical Emergency Fund at one time.
- C.** This permit is still used for raffles, etc.

XIV. Initiated and maintained an annual President’s Appreciation Holiday Luncheon for employees

- A.** The President’s office cooks and serves a lunch to all staff to show my appreciation to them for all of their hard work and dedication to our people throughout the year.
- B.** The President does not cater this out but pitches in to make sure that there is plenty of food and presented in a festive atmosphere.

XV. Secured a Bureau of Indian Affairs Guaranteed Loan for financing our tribal headquarters building

- A.** This loan had the lowest possible interest rate at the time of the financing.
 - 1.** When I was elected the building was still operating under a construction loan at a rate of 16% to 17% per annum.
- B.** The lower interest rates saved the tribe tens of thousands of dollars.
 - 1.** The BIA Guaranteed Loan had a rate of approximately 7.5% in a market where standard bank loans were 12% to 14% per annum.
- C.** When interest rates went down we refinanced the loan again to save the tribe even more money while increasing equity in the building.

XVI. Led the process of incorporating a “tribal statute” system for fixed policies of the tribe

- A.** Our statutes help us function more like a government than other non-profit organizations.
- B.** These statutes minimize the need to adopt common or uniform policies on the same issue year-after-year.
- C.** Codified tribal statutes are much easier to amend when conditions change rather than tracing resolutions passed in previous years.

XVII. Wrote the initial Standing Rules of Order and led the process in getting them adopted by the General Assembly

- A.** These standing rules serve as convention rules and procedures for delegates while in General Assembly.
- B.** These rules have help reduce confusion and misunderstanding of delegates on rules used in all General Assemblies.

XVIII. Began the practice of having special music to start each day of the General Assembly

- A.** This helps us prepare our minds and souls for dealing with the duties before us in a sensible way.

XIX. Began the process of having the President and Executive Council march in at the beginning of the General Assembly in regalia

- A.** This reminds us of who we really are.
- B.** It is to respect our culture as we carry out the business of our people.
- C.** This adds dignity to our General Assemblies.

XX. Initiated the Tribal Host and Tribal Hostess program

- A. This gives our delegates the opportunity to honor a living tribal person who has dedicated their lives to our people.
- B. This practice reminds us that we must continue to respect and revere our elders.

XXI. Initiated the Tlingit Haida Citizenship/Delegate Award

- A. Recognizes the outstanding Tlingit or Haida citizen or delegate who has made substantial contributions to our society over the past year.
- B. The person selected is automatically the Tlingit Haida nomination for the Alaska Federation of Natives Citizen of the Year.
- C. This encourages our people to do well throughout the year in helping others and contributing to their local communities.

XXII. Suggested the practice of honoring a significant elder at an evening function during our General Assembly

- A. I made the suggestion and Judy George made the motion to initiate this practice.
- B. This also gives us the opportunity to look among our notable people to see who has done a lot for us and deserves tribal recognition.

XXIII. Initiated the “President’s Lifetime Achievement Award”

- A. I am the only Tlingit and Haida President to award this highest and most significant award of recognizing lifetime achievement.
- B. The President gives special recognition to individuals who have accomplishments throughout their life that is of significant benefit to the Tlingit and Haida people.
 - 1. The recipient is a person who has dedicated their life to the betterment of the Tlingit and Haida people.
- C. Recipients:
 - 1. Dr. Walter Soboleff
 - 2. Richard Stitt
 - 3. Nora Dauenhauer

XXIV. I was first President to make it a standard policy to have time set aside on each and every General Assembly agenda for a memorial service to remember the people we lost in our communities the past year

- A. This is a time to show respect for those tribal citizens who passed away throughout the past year.
- B. The process has evolved to a “Tribal Book of Remembrances”.

XXV. The first to established the position of Youth Representative on the Executive Council

- A.** This took us from just talking about encouraging our youth to actually getting them directly involved in tribal business at the highest level.
- B.** Past youth who served on our Executive Council have very much taken leadership roles in the communities they represented.
 - 1.** Our very first youth representative, Dennis Gray, Jr. became elected as Mayor of Hoonah.
 - 2.** Others have excelled in their organizations of choice.

XXVI. Initiated action to establish the first Miss Tlingit and Haida Leadership Pageant

- A.** This was the first effort to celebrate the leadership qualities of our young people as a regular part of General Assembly activities.
- B.** This is not a beauty contest; contestants expertly and gracefully present our Native culture in a positive light that makes us all proud to be Tlingit or Haida while demonstrating leadership qualities.
- C.** One of our contestants (Madeline Soboleff- Levy) went on to be the first tribal citizen to be selected as Miss National Congress of American Indians, the highest level of achievement in Indian Country for youth leadership.

XXVII. The only Tlingit & Haida President to ever meet five different United States Presidents

- A.** Ronald Reagan
- B.** Gerald Ford
- C.** George Bush
- D.** Bill Clinton
- E.** George W. Bush

XXVIII. The only Tlingit & Haida President to ever meet with the Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghali

- A.** The Secretary General is the highest position in the United Nations.

XXIX. The only Tlingit & Haida President to ever ride down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC in full Tlingit regalia in a Presidential Inaugural Parade

XXX. Helped to build the only tribal vocational training & resource center in Southeast Alaska

- A.** Laid the foundation by purchasing the land from the Juneau Tlingit & Haida Community Council.
- B.** Joined forces with four other Southeast Alaska IRA tribes to garner the funding for this building.
- C.** Staff members wrote the details of the proposal that led to the final building.

XXXI. Tlingit Haida Central Council was the first tribe in Alaska to enter into a Self-Governance Compact with the United States

- A. This compact gives us the right to negotiate with the Department of the Interior for tribal shares of Bureau of Indian Affairs administrative dollars.
- B. The compact provides us flexibility to determine dollar amounts in each BIA program to the maximum benefit of our clients.
- C. Compacting is now the ultimate in tribal management of federal programs.

XXXII. Tlingit Haida Central Council was the first tribe in the nation to enter into a PL 102-477 Compact with the United States

- A. This compact gives us the flexibility to focus funding from a number of different funding sources for the maximum benefit of our clients.

XXXIII. Represented Alaska on the first Bureau of Indian Affairs Reorganization Taskforce

- A. This was a group established in the early 1980s to investigate ways to reorganize the Bureau of Indian Affairs so that it could be more responsive to needs in Indian Country.
- B. I chaired the Budget Subcommittee of this group.

XXXIV. I was appointed to the first Department of the Interior Office of the Special Trustee Board

- A. This 1994 Act was the first Act of Congress attempting to improve BIA Trust Management to acceptable standards.
- B. This Board uncovered the many weaknesses in the BIA Trust Management system...many of which are still not corrected.

XXXV. Initiated action that led to the only State of Alaska legislative hearings on State/Tribal relations

- A. In 2001, I petitioned Alaska legislators to hold hearings on ways to improve the relations between Alaska tribal governments and the State of Alaska.
- B. The Alaska House of Representatives held a 3-hour hearing to listen to witnesses discuss the value of Alaska Native tribal governments to Alaska and some who oppose the State of Alaska recognizing tribal governments.

XXXVI. I was appointed by President Bush to the President's Advisory Council on Tribal Colleges and Universities

- A. This Board advises the United States President on issues relating to the management of tribal colleges and universities as well as the President's "No Child Left Behind" policy.

XXXVII. I was appointed to represent Alaska on the National Tribal / BIA Budget Advisory Council

- A.** This is a tribally initiated advisory council pulled together to work with BIA and Department of the Interior officials to increase the base dollars within the BIA that goes to tribes.
- B.** Served a year as a tribal co-chair.
- C.** Served as the tribal co-chair of the special taskforce to improve efficiency of the BIA Budget Advisory Council.

XXXVIII. I was the only Tlingit Haida President elected several terms as the Alaska Vice-President of the National Congress of American Indians

- A.** Also served several terms as the alternate.
- B.** Chaired the Constitution Committee that rewrote the NCAI Constitution and Bylaws to what they are today.
- C.** Authored the NCAI Standing Rules and led action to have them adopted.
 - 1.** I will always gratefully remember Joe Delacruz of the Quinault Nation and former NCAI President standing up in support of these rules when others were doubtful as to their value or need.
- D.** Chaired several General Assemblies.
- E.** Served as parliamentarian.
- F.** Chaired the special NCAI Federal Appropriations Taskforce.

XXXIX. I was appointed to represent Alaska on the National Tribal / BIA Trust Asset Management Taskforce

- A.** This was an attempt of tribal leaders to mitigate the problems of Trust Management within the BIA to shorten the litigation process and improve federal management of tribal and individual assets held in trust by the federal government.

XL. Was appointed to serve on the one and only State of Alaska Commissioner of Education's Taskforce on Native Achievement

- A.** Governor Cowper created this taskforce to investigate ways to improve the achievement of Natives in Alaska's schools.

XLI. Visited Southeast Alaska communities more than any other tribal leader

- A.** Set up the annual circuit of BIA program manager reports to communities under the T&H compact.
- B.** Chaired Executive Council meetings in Southeast Alaska communities.
- C.** Attended Sealaska shareholder meetings in communities.
- D.** Attended local community special functions.
 - 1. Totem pole raisings
 - 2. Elizabeth Peratrovich Day celebrations
 - 3. Honor Potlatches
 - 4. Community building dedications
- E.** Attended local memorial events.
 - 1. Funerals
 - 2. Memorial services
 - 3. 40-day parties
 - 4. Memorial honor potlatches
- F.** Was honored to give graduation commencement addresses.
 - 1. Craig High School
 - 2. Dzanti Ka Heeni Jr. High
 - 3. University of Alaska Southeast – Juneau Native Students program
 - 4. University of Alaska Southeast – Ketchikan Campus

XLII. Speaking Engagements

- A.** Alaska Federation of Natives Keynote Address Speaker.
- B.** Environmental Protection Agency – Annual National Native American Conference.
- C.** National Tribal Employment Rights Conference Keynote Address Speaker.
- D.** Welcome Address to the National Congress of American Indians Mid-Year Convention held in Juneau.
- E.** Spoke on behalf of Tlingit Haida Central Council at the first Elizabeth Peratrovich Day celebration ceremony in Juneau.
- F.** Seattle Tlingit Haida Community Council Elizabeth Peratrovich Day Keynote Speaker.
- G.** Sitka ANB & ANS Elizabeth Peratrovich Day Keynote Speaker.
- H.** Seattle ANB & ANS Elizabeth Peratrovich Day Keynote Speaker.
- I.** Ketchikan Indian Communities Swearing in of Officers ceremony
- J.** Tribal Leader Comments (designated speaker) at the National BIA/IHS Self-Governance Conference.

K. Invited to speak on Alaska tribal issues at Alaska Federal Employees Association Annual Meeting.

L. Invited to speak on Alaska tribal issues at Commonwealth North monthly breakfast forum.

M. Annual Tribal Report to Alaska Native Brotherhood / Sisterhood Grand Camp.

XLIII. Provided testimony to Congress many, many times

A. Native American budgets.

B. Programs to Alaska Natives.

C. Bureau of Indian Affairs reorganization.

D. Trust Management.

E. Self-Governance.

F. Native Allotment Certification Acceleration Act.

G. Bureau of Indian Affairs efficiency.

H. National Congress of American Indians testimony on Indian programs.

XLIV. Tlingit Haida Technology Industries

A. I was the first tribal leader to bring technology jobs to rural Alaska.

B. Department of the Interior contract that employed 22 tribal citizens.

C. Department of Defense contract that employed 34 tribal citizens.

XLV. Increased staff size

A. Tlingit Haida Central Council had approximately 65 employees when I was elected in 1984 and now has approximately 300.

XLVI. Increased Native hire

A. Only 3 of 8 managers were Native when I was elected and now all but 2 of our 21 managers are Native.

B. Approximately 90% of Tlingit Haida Central Council staff is Native.

XLVII. Led the effort to getting Tlingit Haida Central Council reinstated by Congress as a federally recognized tribe

- A.** In 1993 Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Ada Deer, published the list of federally recognized tribes in the *Federal Register* and purposely left Tlingit Haida Central Council off of the list.
 - 1.** Appeals to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior to reinstate our tribe were not successful.
- B.** I immediately began working with tribal attorney, Phil Baker-Shenk, on proposed federal legislation to reinstate Tlingit Haida Central Council onto the list of federally recognized tribes published in the *Federal Register*.
- C.** Public Law 103-454 was passed by both Houses of Congress on the last day of the 103rd Congress.
- D.** In early 1994, President Clinton signed into law Public Law 103-454 which reinstated Tlingit Haida Central Council as a federally recognized tribe possessing tribal governing powers similar to other federally recognized tribes in the United States.