



Daily News-Miner

THE VOICE OF INTERIOR ALASKA

Inside Today Sprint mushing legend Roxy Wright wins first Fur Rondy since 1993. » SPORTS, B1

Winterfest marks Denali's 100th

By Kris Capps
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DENALI NATIONAL PARK — Charles Sheldon and Harry Karstens were the wilderness version of the odd couple.

That is how professional storyteller Ingrid Nixon described the two historic figures who played a pivotal role in creating Denali National Park 100 years ago.

Charles Sheldon was an East Coast businessman, born into affluence, educated at Yale, successful enough to retire in his 30s. He was also an ardent hunter-naturalist. Harry Karstens was born in Chicago, received a limited education, but earned a Ph.D. — “and then some” — on how to not only survive, but to thrive in the Far North.

They met, Nixon said, because “Charles needed a guide and Harry needed a job.”

Historians would certainly love to know what they talked about during their time together in a cabin in the remote wilderness. They do know the two men agreed it would be worthwhile trying to make this far-north area a national park.

Civilization was beginning to encroach and they feared hunters would soon decimate area wildlife to feed workers in nearby towns.

“Their time together was limited, but that common vision was something that united them for the rest of their lives,” she said.

It was that vision that helped create the park, so visitors today can experience it much the same way Sheldon and Karstens did 100 years ago.

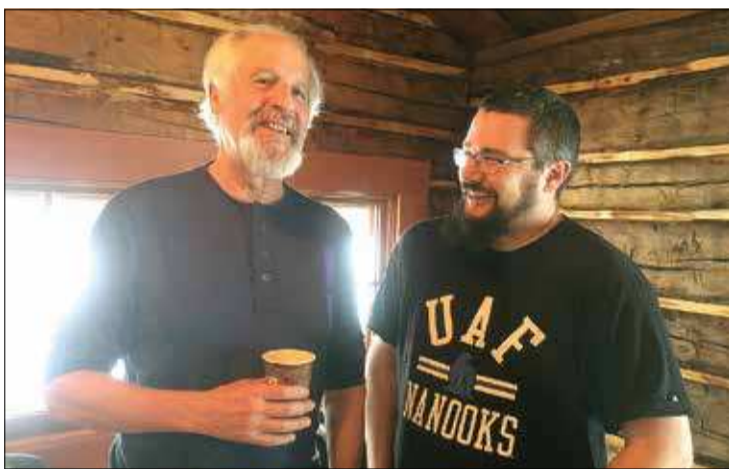


Above: Mount McKinley National Park, seen in this photo, was created in 1917.

COURTESY DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE MUSEUM COLLECTION

Left: Charlie Sheldon and Ken Karstens met for the first time at the Denali Centennial celebration. They have special connection to the history of the park.

KRIS CAPPS/NEWS-MINER



“It’s that common vision that allows us today, to walk on this landscape and marvel at the wildlife and to savor that first blueberry of the season,” Nixon said. She also has a special connection to the park, having once served as its top interpreter.

She told that story at the end of a three-day celebration

that saw swarms of people visit Denali National Park for the annual celebration of the season called Winterfest. Fresh snowfall and mild temperatures helped make the weekend a big and busy success.

This year, the event marked the 100th birthday of Denali National Park.

Visitors came from Fair-

banks, Anchorage, Palmer, Australia, Minnesota and more.

Dignitaries who attended special historical and birthday events Sunday, included representatives from the governor’s office and two Alaska members of the national Boone and Crockett Club. Tim Brady, of

DENALI » A4

Storm closes Interior highways

Staff Report
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A winter storm packing high winds and heavy snow amid relatively warm conditions has closed one Interior Alaska highway and made travel difficult throughout the region.

The Steese Highway is closed between Miles 80-114, over two high summits, because of high winds and drifting snow, according to the Alaska Department of Transportation late Sunday afternoon.

The Elliott and Dalton highways north of Fairbanks are expected to become impassible overnight. Heavy snow and high winds are affecting the Elliott between Miles 73-110 and the Dalton between Miles 20-22, as well as Miles 305-330.

No maintenance is planned on either highway after 5:30 p.m. and travel is not advised Sunday. The travel advisory is in effect through today.

Closer to Fairbanks, travel remains difficult on many local roads. School buses will be using alternate stops this morning and afternoon. Check www.k12northstar.org/Page/4051 for details on specific bus stop locations.

STORM » A4

GOOD MORNING



The weather.
Cloudy with snow showers through the day and patchy freezing fog.
High today 21
Low tonight -9

WEATHER » A7

Aurora forecast.
Auroral activity will be moderate. Weather permitting, moderate auroral displays will be visible overhead.

This information is provided by aurora forecasters at the Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. For more information about the aurora, visit <http://www.gialaska.edu/AuroraForecast>

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SOURDOUGH JACK:
“Not sayin’ how old I am, but I’d like a celebration, too.”



Former police chief breaks silence

By Kevin Baird
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Former Police Chief Randall Aragon broke his silence denying any wrongdoing in operating his secondary security business.

“I got permission. I had a business license. There was no rules against working outside (my duties as police chief),” Aragon said in a phone interview last month. “In my heart of hearts, I know I didn’t do anything inappropriate.”

Aragon, who resigned in October, said he was ordered to keep silent while an investigation — into whether his business presented a conflict of interest — was ongoing.

In early 2016, Aragon sought permission from then-Mayor John Eberhart to start a security survey business, according to records obtained by the News-Miner. As a Certified Protection Professional, Aragon started his own licensed business called Certified Security Surveys in March.

Aragon’s security business became public knowledge in September when retired Fairbanks police Chief Dan Hoffman wrote an open letter alleging Aragon was using his position as police chief to promote his private security business over a service the Fairbanks Police Department offers at no cost. In the letter, Hoffman detailed interactions a business owner (an acquaintance of Hoffman’s) had with Aragon throughout the summer. Hoffman requested a swift investigation into the matter.

Hoffman sent the letter to City Council members and media outlets throughout Alaska on the weekend of Sept. 17, including the News-Miner. Aragon was at the FBI Academy in Virginia at the time.

“I try to be transparent, but I’ve

been advised by city administration that it’s under investigation, and I’ve been advised not to talk to anyone,” Aragon told the News-Miner in a Sept. 19 phone interview.

Later that night at a City Council meeting, former-Councilwoman Vivian Stiver read Hoffman’s letter during the public commenting period.

“Hoffman didn’t even attend City Council. (Then-Councilman Jim) Matherly goes off on me, and I’m in Virginia, and I can’t even defend myself,” Aragon said about the Sept. 19 meeting. “I wanted to tell you this is a setup. Why would (Hoffman) send a copy to every media outlet in Alaska?”

“Why didn’t he call me and ask me what the heck happened? Chiefs have a bond,” he said. “He could have called me. I would have told him everything I told (the investigator).”

“I was tried, sentenced and convicted in that meeting.”

Eberhart’s office contracted a third party investigator at the request of City Council. The Soldotna-based Russell Consulting launched an investigation. Aragon resigned Oct. 27. Aragon said he wasn’t running from any potential findings. He said it was time for him to move on and he knew he was a “goner anyways.”

“My congratulations to you regarding your being elected mayor of Fairbanks, Alaska,” Aragon wrote to Matherly in his letter of resignation. “I realize that as the new mayor (and city’s CEO) that you have the administrative right to choose your own cabinet members, which includes chief of police.”



Aragon

ARAGON » A4

SPOTLIGHT · ADAM GILLETTE



University of Alaska Fairbanks Salisbury Theatre set builder Adam Gillette poses in the backstage workshop Tuesday morning. ERIC ENGMAN/NEWS-MINER

Tech director adds light, color to Fairbanks theater

By Sam Friedman
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Theater technical director Adam Gillette is building the bedroom of an early 1990’s Knoxville, Tennessee, home this week for a play that’s being performed at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

The play’s director has asked him to create the bedroom where five bridesmaids take refuge from a wedding reception in the university’s production of “Five Women Wearing the Same Dress” next month.

Gillette’s job is to construct what looks like a wealthy southern home using only a school theater budget. He’s building thin walls 14 feet tall and dangling a chandelier from above to create the perception of a high-ceilinged room. Thanks to a hardware store donation, he’s got lam-

inate wood material for the flooring.

In the back of his mind, Gillette is also thinking about the other productions he’s working on this month: the best way to illuminate a carnivorous plant for the Lathrop High School production of “Little Shop of Horrors” and the puppet of the mythical sea witch Qalupilak in the Seward’s Follies production of “Alone in the Dark.”

Last week, he was also in the middle of doing technical support to round-the-clock Barda-Thon reading of William Shakespeare’s complete works.

Gillette, 34, is one of only a handful of theater professionals in Fairbanks. Since 2009, he’s been the scene shop manager at the university, a three-quarter time job that involves building sets for the

SPOTLIGHT » A4

