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WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATES YUKON ELDER BEADWORK

WHITEHORSE – In recognition of Women's History Month, Women's Directorate and Tourism and Culture Minister Elaine Taylor unveiled a poster entitled "Honouring Yukon Elder Beadwork". The Women's Directorate worked closely with the Yukon Archives and the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle to produce a poster celebrating the art of Fanny Charlie, Marge Jackson, Annie Smith and Gertie Tom.

"2007 marks the 15th anniversary of Women's History Month," Taylor said. "The Yukon government is proud to acknowledge and celebrate Yukon women and their important role in the development of the territory. This year, we not only highlight the artistic accomplishments of four talented Yukon First Nation elders, but we also honour the tradition of beadwork handed down from generation to generation by First Nation women."

As part of Women's History Month celebrations, the life and art of Marge Jackson, a Champagne and Aishihik First Nations author, artist and elder will be celebrated at a public lecture on October 17th at Skookum Jim Friendship Centre beginning at 7 p.m.

The following evening, October 18th, an exhibit entitled "My Country is Alive" that documents Jackson's art and life history will open at the Yukon Archives beginning at 7 p.m.

Dr. Beth O'Leary, a cultural anthropologist from New Mexico State University who worked closely with Marge Jackson on her book *My Country is Alive: A Southern Tutchone Life*, will be in Whitehorse to celebrate Marge's life and art at both evening events.

The "Honouring Yukon Elder Beadwork" poster created in celebration of Women's History Month will be distributed throughout the territory.

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Attached: Artist biographies - Fanny Charlie, Marge Jackson, Annie Smith and Gertie Tom.

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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

YUKON ELDER BEADWORK: BRIEF ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Fanny Charlie has lived all her life in Old Crow, Yukon. She considers herself a self-taught beadworker and creates her own designs. Charlie is recognized as one of Yukon's finest beadwork artists.



Fanny Charlie's beadwork is a good example of Old Crow beading. There are design elements such as floral patterns that make the Old Crow style distinctive. These are based on real flowers as well as fanciful ones. The floral design generally consists of large detailed flowers, which are symmetrical and often repeated in the same garment. Modern beadwork uses larger beads than those traditionally used. Old Crow beading differs from the southern Tlingit who generally use animal motifs.

Fanny's beadwork "Baby Belt" is part of the Yukon Permanent Art Collection. Baby Belts were worn across the body and used to carry the infant on the hip or back. Traditionally, a woman would bead the belt during her pregnancy.

Marge Jackson, a Champagne/Aishihik First Nations elder, was born and raised in Yukon. She learned sewing from women elders when she was seven. Marge is a recognized beadwork artist and her moose hide moccasins, mukluks and other art have won awards all over Canada.

Marge Jackson wrote a book, *My Country is Alive: A Southern Tutchone Life*, with the assistance of Dr. Beth L. O'Leary, a New Mexico State University Anthropology professor.



Marge owns a shop at Klukshu where she sells her work along with bannock and tea. She enjoys telling stories to people who visit the village in the summer months.

Marge Jackson's sewing, beadwork and her life history as a Champagne/Aishihik First Nations Elder will be presented at an exhibit and public lecture co-hosted by Yukon Archives and Women's Directorate in Whitehorse on Oct 17 and 18, 2007. Dr. Beth O'Leary will be participating in these events.

Annie Smith was born and raised in Whitehorse. Annie is the eldest of three children and is a member of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation. When she was growing up her parents taught her how to fish, hunt, trap, and to dry fish and meat. Summers were spent at fish camp as well as picking berries, tanning hides and sewing. Her mother and aunts taught Annie to sew and do bead work. Annie has supported herself through sewing most of her life. Annie has ten children, nine daughters and one son, and many grandchildren.



Two of Annie's dolls are part of the Yukon Permanent Art Collection. Marge Jackson is Annie's aunt.

Gertie Tom was born at Big Salmon in the Yukon. She was brought up in the bush in a family of nine children. The family lifestyle was dependent on food sources and included summers at fish camp where they caught and dried fish. Hunting season was accompanied by smoking and drying of meat, a role traditionally held by women. Gertie was taught how to sew by her mother. During winter the women would make moccasins or other pieces of clothing. In the spring, the family would travel to Carmacks or Whitehorse to sell the furs and get supplies.

In 1948, the family moved to Whitehorse. Gertie married and became a community health worker. In 1977 she began working with Yukon Native Languages, part of the Department of Education, Yukon Government. She taught others to speak her Northern Tutchone language and learned to read and write. She wrote several books including *My Country* and *How to Tan Hides*.



Gertie's interest in traditional garments and functional objects began with her mother describing items used by aunts, uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers and by actually seeing the articles in use. She saw that many of these articles were no longer being made, often due to the convenience of purchasing ready-made articles in the stores. Not wanting the skills needed to create these objects lost to her people, she began to preserve the skills through her books as well as production of traditional items.

The Yukon Permanent Art Collection is home to Gertie's work including "Firebag" and "Dog Packs".

Photo credits: Fanny Charlie: S. Smith, copyright VGFN
Marge Jackson: Dr. Beth O'Leary
Annie Smith and Gertie Tom: Robin Round