

Alaskan Native Language Software Released

Feb 21, 2007

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HARRISONBURG, Va. (February 21, 2007) — Located just a morning's dogsled ride north of the Arctic Circle and nestled in 11 villages along Alaska's northwestern coast and rivers, you'll find the Iñupiat people engaged in an initiative to breathe new life into their cherished but threatened native language.

With the help of Rosetta Stone Inc., a language-learning company based in Harrisonburg, Virginia, the Iñupiat have worked for two years on a CD-ROM project to teach the Iñupiaq language. The software is being released this week to the NANA Regional Corporation, an Alaska Native corporation whose people have inhabited the coastal areas of northwest Alaska for thousands of years.

"The excitement began months and months ago; our people have been waiting for it," said Leland Barger, director of Inuunialiqput, the cultural arm of NANA Regional Corporation. "We are slowly losing our language. And this CD will help us to revitalize it."

It's the second such project for Rosetta Stone. Last year, the global company and the Mohawk community located near Montréal, Québec, released language-learning software for the Mohawk (Kanien'kéha) language. *New Focus On A Language*

Willie Goodwin Jr., 52, of Kotzebue, Alaska, said knowledge of the Iñupiaq language dipped when his generation was kept from using it at school. Now, many of their young people understand Iñupiaq, but don't speak it fluently.

"I grew up with my grandparents out in the country in a sod house; we spoke Iñupiaq at home," said the elder, who helped record audio for the software. "I still think in it when I hunt. But as long as the younger generation doesn't speak it, it's hard for them to understand what we say or do. I see the longing in their eyes; they want to know more about their own culture."

Maija Johnson, NANA communications manager, hopes to strengthen her own two children's grounding in Iñupiaq. She said 1,000 copies of the CD-ROM will be distributed in the community.

"This software is going to be an important tool for us," Johnson said. "There have been other tribes where the last speaker dies, and the only person left who knows the language is a scholar who isn't going to be teaching it to anyone. That's not going to happen to us."

In celebration of the software release, Rosetta Stone's Endangered Language Program is helping to sponsor native musher Gerald Isugaaq Outwater, 16, in the Junior Iditarod near Anchorage on Feb. 24-25.

Rosetta Stone decided to sponsor Outwater, Goodwin's grandson, in support of cultural preservation, and to thank its NANA partners.

A Natural Choice

Rosetta Stone is a natural choice for language revitalization programs because it helps users develop everyday proficiency naturally, the same way people learn their first language — by associating new words with real-life meaning.

Ilse Ackerman, editor-in-chief and member of the Endangered Language Program at Rosetta Stone, said that Iñupiaq words are equated to images, not to English, in the software — ensuring that words don't lose the many aspects of their meaning in the teaching process. Hundreds of the photographs in the Iñupiaq product are cultural, local images provided by NANA.

The Iñupiaq language software was produced through Rosetta Stone's Endangered Language Program, which was created to undertake language revitalization projects at the request of sponsoring groups such as First Nations, corporations or schools. The software, produced by Rosetta Stone, is distributed exclusively by the sponsoring group; in this case, NANA Regional Corporation in Alaska. There are 11,400 shareholders in NANA, with more than half still living in the area.

"Rosetta Stone is a non-threatening way to learn the language; you can learn in the security of your own home, make mistakes and gain the confidence to speak with others," Ackerman said. "It can supplement language revitalization efforts when there aren't enough fluent teachers and speakers. We're at a critical time in history in North America, a tipping point where we stand to lose a lot of languages — and the software can multiply the efforts of the remaining native speakers."

About Rosetta Stone

Rosetta Stone is a revolutionary CD-ROM and online language-learning program acclaimed for the speed, power and effectiveness of its Dynamic Immersion™ method. Teaching 31 languages to millions of people in over 150 countries throughout the world, Rosetta Stone is the key to language-learning success. The company was founded in 1992 on two core beliefs: that the

natural way people learn languages as children remains the most successful method for learning new languages; and that interactive technology can replicate and activate that immersion method powerfully for learners of any age. The company is based in Harrisonburg, Va. For more information, visit www.RosettaStone.com.