

FOR UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

# Northern

SEPTEMBER 2004

V I S I O N



TOTEM  
TEDDY  
RETURNS  
HOME



## Angoon Adventure

Fifteen minutes after our amphibious three-passenger Cessna sputtered off the Juneau International Airport runway, I was certain I would barf. We'd flown about 20 miles over the Inside Passage's choppy waters — scarcely one-third of the way to Angoon — and already, I had resorted to closed eyes and deep breathing. I spent the next 25 minutes wondering if the water landing could be worse than the flight and, for some inexplicable reason, pondering the euphemism "she met a watery grave."

It was almost nice to have something new to worry about. Finding a way to get from Greeley to the remote Tlingit village in time for Totem Teddy's arrival had been a last-minute scramble — second only to the frenzy of finding passage for the totem itself. UNC and the Tlingit had been talking for two years about the totem's return, but when everything converged to make it happen, we had 13 days between the totem's Greeley farewell and its Angoon welcome.

I wanted to record the story of the totem's journey for the thousands of UNC alumni who know the popular bear. It was a journalist's dream — a once-in-a-lifetime local event, a newsworthy national issue, the chance to experience a little-known place and culture.

The university quickly agreed I should go, but my role had snowballed into something I feared: UNC Anthropology professor Sally McBeth and I were to be UNC emissaries of a sort. I am far more accustomed to playing journalist than ambassador. Writing allows editing that is impossible in person.

The Tlingit were gracious when they visited Greeley, but I worried that we had exhausted their patience for ignorant questions. I worried that those who hadn't traveled to Greeley would find their Brown Bear Totem's condition less of a "pleasant surprise." I worried that the 600-pound concrete bear would not travel well, and there I would be to explain.

So, it wasn't such a bad distraction to be sitting in the little plane, wondering if the pilot would only laugh if I asked for a barf bag. I never found the nerve to ask him, and fortunately, it was just as well. The water landing was a breeze, and after five minutes on the ground, still green, I found myself swearing I hadn't been the least bit afraid.

My worries about what we would find in Angoon evaporated just as quickly. Perhaps any visitor is worth a chat when you live in a village of 600, but I'd rather believe the people we met were happy we'd come to see the totem home.

Person after person shared stories of Tlingit history, of local politics, of the ways of their grandparents and hopes for their children. The local judge visited for hours one evening, explaining complicated tribal customs and history. A dozen adults took a break from their computer class to meet us when we arrived unannounced. A fisherman insisted that we call his sister and ask that she include us in the lunch count at the senior center. Children invited us to a party at their school. A woman who grew up in Angoon called us into her house for coffee as we walked by one cold morning.

We were among friends two days later as we waited with 40 others for the ferry to bring the totem. The custom crates UNC carpenters made for the totem delivered it without a scratch. The ceremony to welcome the totem was extraordinary. And in a happy ending appropriate to our time on Admiralty Island, the plane that came to take us home was huge. Relieved, I joined nine other passengers on the full flight.

Gloria Reynolds

Northern Vision replaces Spectrum as the University of Northern Colorado's magazine for alumni and friends. The name and the look are new, but you'll still find stories about inspiring alumni, campus news, and the diligent students and faculty who make us a university.

Redesigning a magazine, too, is an adventure — albeit not of the same caliber as my journey to Angoon. Designer Aggie Kelley made this adventure possible and deserves the credit for the magazine's new look. I hope you will share your thoughts and suggestions as we continue our journey.  
—GR



**ON THE COVER**

*Front:* Details of the Brown Bear Totem. Cover design by Aggie Kelley.

*Back:* Bear Clan members of the Tlingit Nation sit beside the bear from their recently-returned totem pole during a welcoming ceremony in Angoon. Photo by Kevin Moloney.

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NORTHERN COLORADO



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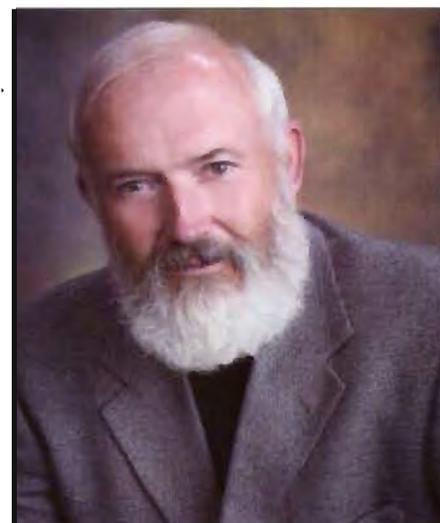
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UNC facilities workers carefully lower a Tlingit Bear Clan totem pole, known by UNC alumni as "Totem Teddy," from its mount in the University Center.

# FULL CIRCLE

## TOTEM RETURNS TO ALASKA

BY GLORIA REYNOLDS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN MOLONEY

*Kaats' Eeti Gaas'* left Angoon, Alaska, in 1908. Some say it was sold; others say it was stolen; some say it simply disappeared.

In 1914, a totem pole arrived at the State Teachers College of Colorado, a gift from 1897 alumnus and South-East Alaska District Superintendent of Schools Andrew Thompson.

Tlingit Indians in Angoon mourned the loss of the Brown Bear Totem and passed its story from generation to generation.

In Greeley, State Teachers College students adopted the bear as their identity and for decades rallied around "Totem Teddy."

Nearly 100 years later, the bear brought the two communities together.

Herman Davis Sr., from left, Thomas Davis, Harold Jacobs and Louise Brady watch as the totem pole is lowered into crates for shipping to Angoon, Alaska. They were among 14 Tlingit who traveled from Angoon to Greeley to retrieve the pole.





Lydia George, seated, Mary Paddock and George Bennett participate in a ceremony at the totem pole the morning before it was taken down from its place in the University Center.

**F**irst sight of the Brown Bear Totem brings several of its owners to tears. One woman compares seeing it to the return of a husband who was believed dead. Most in the group of 14 have not imagined walking into UNC's University Center to see what their grandmothers once talked about. They know the story of the totem's disappearance, but no one can recall when it stood more than 20 feet tall on the Angoon shoreline.

Don Johnson tells the story his grandmother often recited about the totem's disappearance: "One day it was there, and another it was gone. It was just like the sun coming up and greeting you in the morning and going down and never coming up again." She was always in tears when she finished.

The Tlingit (pronounced KLINK-it) may have shared that story for many more generations had UNC alumnus Peter Corey not changed its ending by recognizing an 1890 photo of the totem as his alma mater's "Totem Teddy." As the crow flies, the totem was 1,771 miles from home.

In 2002, Tlingit Cultural Resource Specialist Harold Jacobs brought Tlingit elders to UNC, and they confirmed the totem was theirs. They invoked the 1990 Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, which helps tribes reclaim archaeological objects with religious or cultural significance.

Months later, when they arrive at the University Center, it is to send the Brown Bear Totem home. The totem's untraditional paint job shocks them, but the totem's condition is a pleasant surprise. They expect worse after hearing stories of its abuse at the hands of school rivals, tar and feathering, theft and painting.

Scaffolding already surrounds the totem as members of the Bear Clan gather to sing "The Cub That Washed Away," a traditional song about a mother bear who wanders up and down the riverbank looking for her bear cub swept away by the current. Unlike the bear in the song, today the mother bear finds her cub.

Storytelling, singing and dancing continue at a public ceremony in the evening, once the totem rests safely in wooden crates. The totem's journey to Greeley is no longer the end of its story. The Tlingit thank UNC for the totem's return and temporarily adopt UNC Director of Native American Student Services Solomon Little Owl into the Raven Clan.

The next morning, Little Owl will leave for Seattle with a moving van carrying the two crates. From Seattle, the totem will travel by barge to Juneau and by ferry to Angoon.



UNC facilities workers pack the totem pole for its return trip to Angoon, Alaska. The crew built special crates for the pole and for the 600-pound bear that sits at its top.

## THE STORY OF KAATS'

The Brown Bear Totem tells of a Tlingit man named Kaats'. In the lengthy story, a bear finds Kaats' while hunting and tosses the man into his den, where the bear's wife hides him to save his life. They eventually marry and have two bear cubs — the ancestors of the Bear House of the Teikweid' Clan in Angoon.

After a long search for Kaats', his younger brother finds him. As the two leave to hunt seals, Kaats' promises the mother bear he won't speak to his human wife. One day as he gets water, his human wife runs after him, and he tells her he can't talk. Because Kaats' has broken his promise, when he returns the bear cubs kill him and leave him in pieces. As the mother bear tries to put the pieces back together, she sings, "Where has my husband gone?"

In Greeley, Bear Clan members begin singing the same song, but stop before the end. "With this song, what we have attempted to do — like the mother bear — is to start putting the pieces back together," Tlingit Cultural Resource Specialist Harold Jacobs says. The song will be finished after the Brown Bear Totem returns to Angoon.

Daniel Johnson, right, and Walter Johns Jr. celebrate with a traditional dance. UNC hosted a repatriation ceremony, where the Tlingit celebrated the return of both the totem pole and a head-dress brought to Greeley from Wisconsin by the Logan Museum of Anthropology at Beloit College.

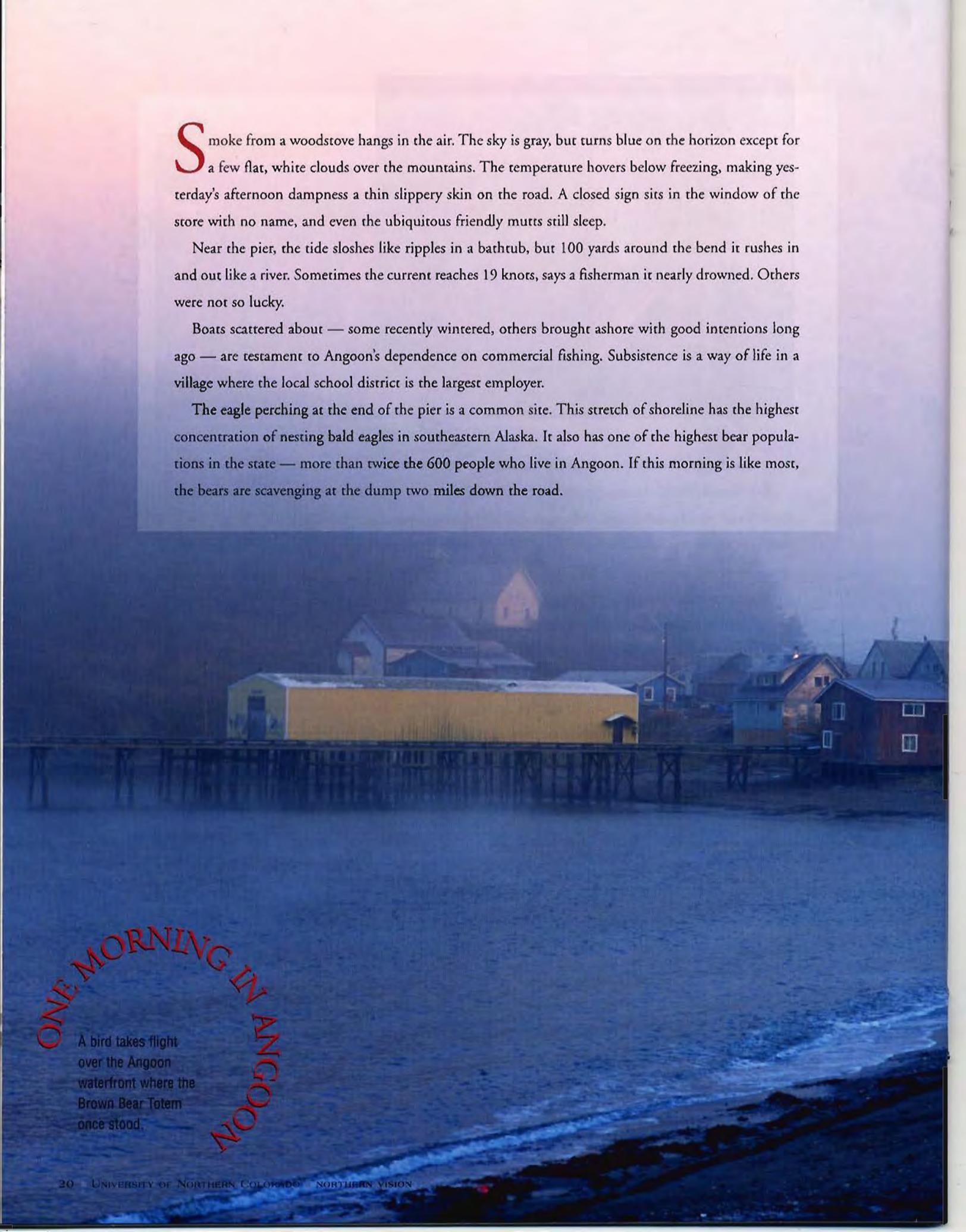


Smoke from a woodstove hangs in the air. The sky is gray, but turns blue on the horizon except for a few flat, white clouds over the mountains. The temperature hovers below freezing, making yesterday's afternoon dampness a thin slippery skin on the road. A closed sign sits in the window of the store with no name, and even the ubiquitous friendly mutts still sleep.

Near the pier, the tide sloshes like ripples in a bathtub, but 100 yards around the bend it rushes in and out like a river. Sometimes the current reaches 19 knots, says a fisherman it nearly drowned. Others were not so lucky.

Boats scattered about — some recently wintered, others brought ashore with good intentions long ago — are testament to Angoon's dependence on commercial fishing. Subsistence is a way of life in a village where the local school district is the largest employer.

The eagle perching at the end of the pier is a common site. This stretch of shoreline has the highest concentration of nesting bald eagles in southeastern Alaska. It also has one of the highest bear populations in the state — more than twice the 600 people who live in Angoon. If this morning is like most, the bears are scavenging at the dump two miles down the road.



ONE MORNING IN ANGOON

A bird takes flight over the Angoon waterfront where the Brown Bear Totem once stood.





In Angoon, Garfield George, from right, Louise Brady and Lydia George pause for reflection when the crated totem pole arrives. More than 40 people waited at the dock for the ferry to bring the totem.

**B**y 6:30 a.m. the day the Brown Bear Totem will arrive in Angoon, more than 40 people huddle in the warmth of their cars and trucks at the ferry dock parking lot. They await the *Aurora*, the 250-passenger ferry some call the blue canoe. As it skims into sight, car doors creak open and people emerge to shiver in the damp, freezing morning.

Ferry is the only way to bring the totem to Angoon, the sole permanent village on southeast Alaska's Admiralty Island, known for hundreds of years to the Tlingit as *Kootznoowoo* — Fortress of the Bears. Access is limited to ferry or seaplane — wind and tide willing.

Several cars drive off the ferry before the wooden crates in the back of Daniel Brown's pickup truck come into view. Drumbeats resonate off the pavement as people gather around the crates to offer solemn words — mostly in Tlingit. In English, Daniel Johnson tells of traveling south to retrieve the totem: "There are no words to explain the excitement we felt when we first laid eyes on this at the college in Colorado — an item that had become legend."

A caravan following Brown's truck creeps at 20 mph past the village's clan houses, stopping at the Bear House and the Valley House to name ancestors who have passed on, making them part of the celebration. At each stop, elders fight back tears and choke on words as they try to express their joy.

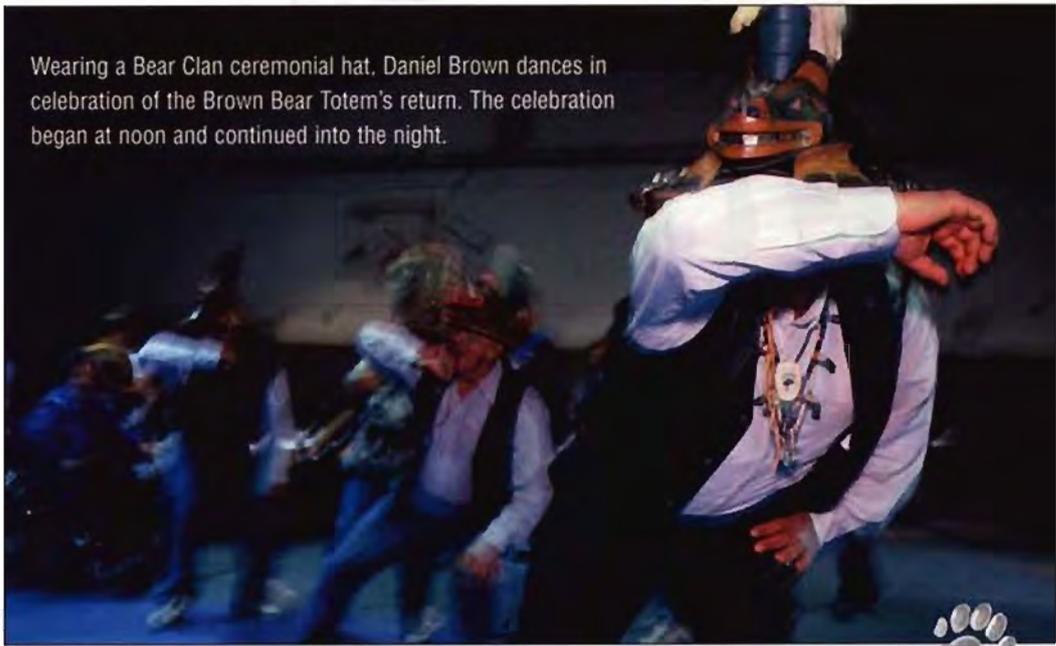
At the elementary school gym, where the community will celebrate the totem's return, it takes 10 men to unload the crates. They sit — still sealed — until the ceremony at 2 p.m.

At the ceremony, Bear Clan members struggle to pull the 600-pound

Jennie Jim wipes a tear during a ceremony to welcome repatriated items to Angoon. She wears the Bear Clan hat her mother wore at a 1904 Tlingit potlatch — the one Beloit College's Logan Museum of Anthropology returned to the Tlingit in Greeley.



Wearing a Bear Clan ceremonial hat, Daniel Brown dances in celebration of the Brown Bear Totem's return. The celebration began at noon and continued into the night.



bear from its tight, upright crate while others sing traditional Tlingit songs. They eventually bring the bear out of hibernation by turning the crate on its side. "When the box was being opened, you could just feel the hearts of the Brown Bear Clan explode," says a representative from the tribe's central council in Juneau.

The ceremony is at once serious and giddy. Tribal elder Lydia George talks of the Brown Bear Totem with great emotion, but goes on to say she doesn't understand how he could stay in school for more than 80 years without graduating.

Clans share songs reserved for special occasions, following the strict tradition of responding to each other's songs to maintain balance. Dancers don headdresses and blankets owned by their clans and passed down for generations. Drums pound, feathers fly and feet stomp in appreciation.

After several hours of celebrating, someone spreads a blanket on the floor, and even those who have been quiet onlookers leave their seats. One by one, they dance forward and toss cash on the blanket. With dozens of fives, 10s and 20s, the Tlingit begin a scholarship that will send a student from Angoon to UNC.

Festivities do not stretch into the wee morning hours only because several of the Bear Clan must catch the 9:30 p.m. ferry. After a final song, they move toward the door, stop to pat the Brown Bear's head and dance into the frigid night.



After the ceremony to welcome the Brown Bear Totem to Angoon, it is moved into Angoon High School by Daniel Johnson, from left, Randy Gamble and Don Johnson.

## ON THE WEB

More stories and photos about Totem Teddy are on the Alumni Association's Web site. Log onto [www.uncalumni.org](http://www.uncalumni.org) and click on the "Totem Teddy" link.

