

Winter in Alaska

by Margaret M. Darrow, *Alaska Alpha '02*

WINTER IN ALASKA. This phrase conjures images of sub-zero temperatures, snow-covered landscapes, and complete darkness. On the coldest days, even the most resilient creatures hunker down, waiting for the return of warmer weather.

Because of fortitude (or perhaps foolishness), the Alaska Alpha Chapter at the University of Alaska Fairbanks decided to move its brass Bent last winter. In 1986, the chapter dedicated the Bent, which had been mounted on a base of raw marble from a local quarry, and jade from western Alaska. On the jade plate was

engraved a description of the chapter, including the dates of inception and dedication. This beautiful display had been placed near a little-used entrance of the Duckering Building, the engineering hall on campus. Through the years, only the smokers who used that entrance for their regular breaks saw the Bent. Tucked away in obscurity, the Bent became tarnished and was nearly forgotten.

For the last few years, our chapter members talked about moving the Bent to a more visible location. This past winter, they seized the opportunity. Tau Beta Pi members asked the appropriate university officials for



Margaret Darrow, Nathanael Vaughan, and Ben Dobrovlny (left to right) work concrete into its form in sub-zero temperatures.



Wilhelm Muench, Alaska Alpha '03, adjusts the chain supporting the Bent.

assistance in determining the Bent's new location, and, after deciding on a new placement, they put the plans into action.

Professor William W. Mendenhall, *New York Delta '48*, who sponsored the Alaska Alpha Chapter in 1975 and who has been Chief Advisor ever since, helped break frozen ground on November 2, 2003. Several vigorous young members mixed concrete in the basement of Duckering and carried it up and outside to the new location in five-gallon buckets. By the end of the day, the foundation pad was in place.

Plans included placing the Bent on a concrete pedestal in order to keep it safe above the blades of snow-removal equipment. Because of time constraints associated with building the concrete form, organizing a donation of concrete, and the normal demands of university classes, chapter members finally poured the pedestal on December 5, 2003 (see photo previous page). It was an exercise in cold-weather concrete pouring, because the temperature

dipped to -42°F that week. Encapsulated in a makeshift canvas tent, the pedestal was alternately chilled by the sub-zero weather and flame-broiled by the 150,000 BTU heater borrowed for the project. After babysitting the pedestal for several days, students removed the form and inspected the concrete. Satisfied with the results, they covered the pedestal to wait for the next phase of the project.

Tau Bates moved the Bent into the Duckering Building, away from the modest winter temperatures, to warm and polish the brass. Amid the fumes of Brasso, the "Bent polishing party" was a success. Chapter members enlisted the help of the physical plant at UA to move the Bent onto its pedestal (photo, left). The project was completed in time for an unveiling during 2004 National Engineer's Week.

Now as the sun climbs higher in the northern sky, it reflects off the newly polished brass. Students streaming to and from the engineering building see the symbol, and many pause to read the inscription. The increased visibility of the monument has improved the overall visibility of our chapter on campus. This project is also a success because it allowed chapter members to put into practice many of the engineering concepts learned during college. The Alaska Alpha Chapter is proud of taking on this project and is especially proud of completing it during the formidable Alaskan winter.

Members of the Alaska Alpha Chapter after the Spring 2004 initiation and the Bent relocation: (left to right, standing) Brian Herold, Michael Kudenov, Micah Houtz, Lauren Staft, Prof. Mendenhall (Advisor), Nathanael Vaughan, Executive Councillor Russell W. Pierce, Aaron Lindberg, and John Strause, MT '03; (in front of the Bent) Lee DeWilde, Todd Krieg, and Margaret Darrow.

