



## ***Natives Of Kodiak, Inc.***

### **NEIL SARGENT MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP**

NOK shareholder Neil Sargent was born in Kodiak on May 25, 1920 to Fred and Fevronia Sargent, one of eleven children, which Neil recalled was an average sized family at the time. Growing up, Neil lived where Kodiak's Sargent Park is now located. The park was named for Neil's grandfather. His great-grandfather attended the ceremony transferring ownership of Alaska from Russia to the United States. Neil recalls that he held the lanyard when the flag was raised.

Neil was an instrumental part of the team of people who created Natives of Kodiak, Inc., and he served on the first Board of Directors. He recalled going to an early gathering and simply raising his hand when asked for volunteers. "It wasn't difficult to get NOK going. We didn't have any money at first. Each village was given \$500 by AFN (the Alaska Federation of Natives) to begin organizing." As far as first business ventures, Neil originated the idea of Natives of Kodiak buying land on Afognak to grow timber for logging. He worked with many devoted people such as Nancy Anderson, who he remembers as "very active. She was a fighter for Native rights and Natives of Kodiak's rights."

Kodiak's population wasn't more than 400 people when Neil was a child. His family barn opened up onto the dirt road and they let their cows out to roam down the street every day. At one point, Neil's father owned a salmon salting business on Shuyak Island, shipping salted salmon in barrels to Seattle for distribution.

Neil began his career as an apprentice carpenter on the Navy Base in the spring of 1941, at the age of nineteen. "I've never had trouble getting a job. Charlie Skinner was an agent to for the carpenter's union at the time and when I applied for a job he said I was too small to be a carpenter, I should be an electrician. I didn't know anything about electricity." Neil joined the carpentry union, making 55% of the wage scale, which came to 55 cents an hour for the first year, an "excellent wage for the time." He helped construct many of the large buildings on base, including hangars, the cold storage supply building and 1,000 tank frames for the Army, as well as the barracks at Fort Greely.

Neil was drafted into the Army in 1942, joining the 177th Engineers, who were eventually stationed at Amchitka. His battalion helped to build the runway, hangar, gas tank farm and warehouses on the island. He recalled that he stayed in a pup tent the first night there,

amazed at how nice the weather was, and woke up to five inches of snow on his sleeping bag, and that turned out to be mild weather for Amchitka. "In the two years I was stationed there, there were only two days with no wind," Neil recalled. After the war, he worked on the transmitter towers at Buskin Lake and the Kodiak High School building. "You could always make money here, with carpentry or fishing, too, for salmon or cod. There was always a market for it."

It was while working on the Navy Base, however, that he met the brothers of his future wife, June Elf Sargent. The Elf brothers were from Washington State and while visiting them, he met June. "I was very lucky to have been married to June for 64 years. Different guys at different times said exactly the same thing, 'Neil, how did you end up with the best girl in town?'"

The Sargent family lived near Mission Beach in 1964. After the earthquake hit, June worriedly told Neil that a tsunami was predicted. Neil wasn't concerned. He'd seen small tsunamis before; they were similar to an unusually high tide. After he ran out to the store, the children came home wondering why there was water covering the yard. Alarmed, June packed them to the evacuation point at the high school, only to learn that her home had been seen floating out to sea. While she was, "boo-hooing," Neil arrived. Upon hearing the news, he replied, "Aw, it wasn't much of a house, anyway."

Everything in their home was lost. In June's agitated state, she'd packed nothing but her cigarettes. Several days later, Neil and his brother went out on a boat to search for the house and miraculously found it floating, only partially submerged. Neil managed to get inside to rescue a few precious items, including a wooden chest that sat by the front door in their new home for the next 45 years. Neil built the new home on Wilson Street in 1965.

Neil passed away on June 8, 2021 at the age of 101, having credited his health and longevity partly to his diet, which "was mostly fish... salmon, halibut, cod. I never had roast beef. I had ham once in a while, but I didn't eat steak."

Regardless of the source of Neil's longevity, NOK has benefited enormously from his dedication to the corporation throughout the years.

We appreciate and honor Neil Sargent's long-standing participation and contributions in the creation and continued success of NOK.