



# Daily News-Miner

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**Inside Today** Girl Scouts donate cookie money to Fairbanks Animal Shelter **A2**

## Private venture aims to replace Carlson Center

By Jack Barnwell

For 35 years, the Carlson Center has been a hub for concerts, expos, graduations and hockey games in Fairbanks. The center, owned by the Fairbanks North Star Borough, has been one of the few venues large enough to host such events.

However, Dan Keck, executive director of the start-up dx/dt, has proposed a new venue that would be attached to a proposed luxury resort called the North Star Grand Lodge, on an 187-acre Ester Dome

property his wife's family owns.

On paper, The Block calls for a 3,600-seat multipurpose civic event venue that includes a permanent NHL-regulation ice arena, 40,000 square feet of convention space, and a 90,000-square-foot rooftop park.

The Block would operate under a nonprofit model, unlike the proposed private, for-profit Grand Lodge luxury resort.

The projected cost is \$110 million, which would be financed "separately from the

resort through tax-exempt revenue bonds, philanthropy and grants."

"The borough would not be asked to fund construction, guarantee debt, raise taxes or pledge taxpayer credit," a dx/dt whitepaper states. Dx/dt also proposes that it would "invest up to \$20 million in private capital" to convert the Carlson Center into a year-round community facility.

Cyrus Vorwald, a dx/dt partner, told the News-Miner on March 29 that The Block would create a "demand generator"

that could attract large events like concerts that normally visit Anchorage. The Carlson Center serves as a primary hub for large-scale concerts and acts.

"Touring groups normally go to Anchorage, but not here," Vorwald said.

He said The Block could capture more events for Fairbanks.

"The Carlson Center as it is today is not a demand generator," Vorwald said. He noted that the Carlson Center poses potential risks, such as if the Assembly votes to close it, it undergoes renovation, or it

otherwise reaches the end of its life cycle.

"The way we approach The Block is that we want it to be a benefit to Fairbanks and it de-risks our lodge because people who go to events there may stay here because they spend the most," he said.

Vorwald said the goal is to have donor capital pay for a large portion of the estimated \$110 million cost. The rest would come from tax-exempt bonds.

**BLOCK » A3**



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHARON MCCONNELL

An audience listens to a presentation on Mary TallMountain's life at the Morris Thompson Cultural Center on Friday, April 3.

## A literary homecoming for Alaska poet Mary TallMountain

By Anna Lionas

Mary TallMountain deserves to be known and celebrated.

Over the past year, Denakkanaaga worked to compile information on TallMountain's life, work and impact in the hopes of sharing her more broadly with Alaska. They created a homecoming for the Koyukon artist who lived outside of the state for much of her life but drew upon the traditions and practices of her Indigenous roots in her nationally recognized poetry.

It started with Anne Hanley, a playwright and former Alaska writer laureate who discovered TallMountain for herself when writing columns on Alaska writers.

"I was surprised that nobody [in Alaska] seemed to know anything about her or had heard about her," Hanley said.

She brought some of TallMountain's work to Sharon McConnell executive director of Denakkanaaga, who was unfamiliar with her, but instantly felt a connection to the poems.

"When she gave me some of her poems to read, it really hit me in my heart," McConnell said. "The stories and history she weaves into her poems about Native culture is just phenomenal."

The women agreed they should do something to both honor TallMountain and use her story to



COURTESY OF ANNE HANLEY

**Denakkanaaga and Tanana Chiefs Conference is hosting a reading of Mary TallMountain's poetry, essays and stories Saturday afternoon at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center.**

inspire people to lean on writing and art to process challenges in life.

### The artist

Mary TallMountain was born on Feb. 12, 1918, in Nulato to Mary Josephine Demoski, who was sick

with tuberculosis. TallMountain's father periodically came through Nulato when the Army stationed him there; he abandoned the family a few years later.

When TallMountain was 2 1/2, she was adopted by Harry and Agnes Randle. She went back and forth between them and her birth mother, eventually leaving Nulato at age 6.

After bouncing around Alaska for a few years with her adoptive parents, they moved to California. Around this time, her adoptive father began abusing and providing alcohol to TallMountain. It set her up for substance abuse later in life.

Some torrid years followed, moving around the U.S., struggling with addiction. TallMountain married twice, both of which failed. In 1956 she moved to San Francisco where she would spend much of the rest of her life, living, loving and creating in the Tenderloin District.

She decided to quit drinking and "make something of her life," producing poems and writings and helping her neighbors.

She reconnected with religion, began publishing her poems and suffered numerous cancers. Later in her life, in 1976, TallMountain

**POET » A3**

## Fairbanks resolution opposes proposed Chena Riverwalk option

By Jack Barnwell

A Fairbanks City Council member has sponsored a resolution opposing a design option for the proposed Chena Riverwalk Stage III project currently being discussed by Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation Planning.

Council member Crystal Tidwell said during a Tuesday work session that she sponsored the resolution because the current design, which calls for a boardwalk over the Chena River floodway near Pioneer Park, has a \$7.1 million price tag.

The proposed design, drafted by the City of Fairbanks at least a decade ago, includes a 3,500-foot-long path along the north side of the Chena River, from a pedestrian bridge across from Pioneer

Park to Peger Road, then up to Phillips Field Road.

About 1,500 feet of the path would require an elevated platform or boardwalk going through the floodplain, which could cost at least \$7.1 million. It's a marked increase from the \$1.7 million estimated in 2017.

The project would also require FAST Planning to agree to a \$800,000 purchase of Alaska Railroad land.

Tidwell's resolution cites the overall cost as a concern but adds the project "diminishes the indented riverfront experience and limits public value by placing portions of the pathway far from the river corridor."

The Chena Riverwalk Stage III project started in 2014 with Alaska Department

**CHENA » A3**

## Assembly Finance Committee reviews parks budget

By Jack Barnwell

Parks and recreation emerged as the segment of a four-hour Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly budget work session on Monday night, where borough staff laid out a recommended budget.

Borough Mayor Grier Hopkins' overall \$214.2 million recommended budget is about \$5.84 million larger than the current fiscal year's budget. It includes a proposed \$64.3 million for education — about 30% of the overall budget — and about \$9.3

million from the general fund to balance, roughly \$400,000 more than last year.

The Parks and Recreation Department operational budget recommends \$11.79 million, about \$500,000 more than the current fiscal year. Parks Director Matthew Boyer said the increase is largely due to the wage increases required by labor agreements.

Boyer said one of his department's overall goals includes continued use of "placer AI,"

**PARKS » A2**

### GOOD MORNING

#### The weather.

Cloudy.

High today ..... 42

Low tonight ..... 25

Sunrise: 6:41 a.m.

Sunset: 9:05 p.m.

**WEATHER » A3**

#### Aurora forecast.

Auroral activity will be low. If skies are clear, low-level displays may be visible overhead from Utqiagvik to Fairbanks, and may be visible low on the northern horizon from as far south as Anchorage and Juneau.



#### SOURDOUGH JACK:

"I am inspired by people like Mary TallMountain."