

## **2025 SNC Elder of the Year**

### **John Waghiyi, Jr.**

John Waghiyi, Jr. was born to Reverends John and Della Waghiyi and grew up in Savoonga and Nome. He currently lives in Savoonga with his wife, Arlene, and their extensive family members, raising their grandchildren to this day. John and Arlene celebrated 51 years of marriage in 2024.

Throughout his life, John has dedicated himself to being a culture bearer and a passionate advocate for Indigenous people. He is a lifelong subsistence provider and captain of a whaling crew and serves on the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission.

John has worked tirelessly to strengthen connections and celebrate the shared cultural traditions and knowledge of the St. Lawrence Island Yupik people, engaging in dance and cultural exchanges with several Siberian Yupik villages in Chukotka, Russia. He has conducted art workshops across Alaska, where he shares traditional carving and sewing techniques and materials to help preserve and pass on these important cultural practices.

For over two decades, John has worked for the Bering Straits School District as a Yupik Language and Cultural History Teacher in Savoonga. He has also coached the high school Native Youth Olympics and basketball teams. At events, he proudly showcases his cultural heritage by performing traditional dances and playing his drum, sharing the traditions he learned from those before him.

As lifelong drummers and dancers, John and Arlene established the Savoonga Youth Drummers and Dancers, a program aimed at revitalizing drumming and dancing among the youth. They also founded the Mangtak Eater's Elementary & Youth Basketball Tournament in Savoonga, inviting elementary and middle school teams from the Bering Straits Region to participate.

An accomplished Siberian Yupik artist and dancer, John embodies the essence of a culture bearer, drawing strength from his ancestors and his steadfast faith. He remains committed to revitalizing and preserving Yupik culture, with a primary focus on engaging the youth in these vital efforts.