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GOVERNOR'S SAFETY & HEALTH SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD **Alaska Avalanche Information Center**

Alaska Avalanche Information Center (AAIC,) a not-for-profit organization operated by a small staff and a team of dedicated volunteers, will be recognized with a Special Achievement Award at the 2016 Alaska Governor's Safety and Health conference in Anchorage on April 6th for their dedication to Snow Safety.

The AAIC is comprised of a network of six snow observation and education centers across the state in highly accessed use areas including: Anchorage, Cordova, Eastern Alaska Range (Fairbanks,) Haines, Hatcher Pass, Juneau, and Thompson Pass (Valdez.) The AAIC works in collaboration with the Chugach National Forest Avalanche Center (Girdwood, Turnagain, Seward) as well as with community and state representatives statewide.

For nearly two decades snow safety in Alaska, where winter is the longest season, has fallen to the citizens. In 2008 the AAIC was formed by a group of dedicated volunteers and snow safety professionals who recognized the need and were determined to find ways to address this problem. Their effort is supported and made possible thanks to the volunteer board of the AAIC and dozens of generous donors working hard to fulfill Alaska State Statute **AS 18.76.010**. This Statute, which mandates the state provide avalanche forecasting and education services for the general public, has had no funding available to provide this service since the 1990's.

In November 2015, AAIC hosted the annual Alaska Snow Safety Summit which brings together snow safety professionals, public agencies, policy makers and the general public to address snow safety concerns in Alaska. The goal of the 2015 Summit was to find ways to sustain, support and improve snow safety efforts in Alaska. US Senator Lisa Murkowski, represented by Greg Kaplan, gave the opening remarks. The Keynote Address was presented by Michael Hopper, an avalanche survivor from interior Alaska.

Hopper lost his dog and friend, Erik Peterson, on December 6th, 2014 in an avalanche in the Eastern Alaska Range near Black Rapids Lodge. This incident sparked a group of volunteers in Fairbanks to band together and launch the Eastern Alaska Range Avalanche Center, the sixth forecast center in the state affiliated with the AAIC.

The need for the services provided by the AAIC has again been tragically highlighted this winter with four separate avalanche fatalities between November 23rd and March 1st.

The annual snow safety summit helps build networks and collaborative projects that are sparking ideas and raising awareness statewide about the importance of providing all residents and visitors to our state a comprehensive, life-saving resource for snow safety.

This is the 3rd time in AAIC's 8-year history they have been recognized for their dedication and hard work in the field of snow safety. The award will be presented on Thursday, April 6th during the 35th annual Alaska Governor's Safety & Health Conference held in Anchorage at the Dena'ina Convention Center.

To learn more or help with this grass-roots effort, contact Debra at dmchan@alaskasnow.org

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