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50 cents

Historical re-enactment to celebrate state's purchase

By ERIC MORRISON
JUNEAU EMPIRE

Haines resident John Venables re-enacts historical Alaska figures as a way to help future generations learn from the past.

"Alaska has had a great history, cultures and traditions that should not be forgotten," Venables said. "I think if we get the information to the youth, they can learn more about how they might be better citizens."

Venables is scheduled to host a history program at 6:30 p.m. tonight in the Egan Room at Centennial Hall in celebration of the 141st anniversary of the purchase of Alaska from Russia and the upcoming 50th anniversary of statehood.

Seward's Day, a state holiday marking the March 30, 1867, purchase of Alaska for \$7.2 million from Russia, will be observed

Know & Go

Who: John Venables of Haines.

What: Historical re-enactments of William Henry Seward and of Judge James Wickersham.

When: 6:30 p.m. tonight.

Where: Egan Room at Centennial Hall.

Admission: Free.

on Monday.

"Basically it's a good reason to have a celebration on the journey to statehood," Venables said.

Tonight's program includes historical re-enactments by Venables of William Henry Seward in "My Greatest Legacy," and of

Please see **CELEBRATION**, Page A4

Journey to Statehood-Seward's Day Gala, 6:30 p.m., Centennial Hall, Egan Room. Featuring Alaska history storytelling about the adventures of William Henry Seward and Judge James Wickersham. Including music by Alaska String Band and Buddy Tabor. Details: John, 523-4953 or Elva, 463-5413.

A4 JUNEAU EMPIRE, FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2008

Celebration: Venables says he hopes his re-enactments help bring legacies to life

Continued from Page A1

Judge James Wickersham in "The Man Who Changed Alaska History and Destiny."

He said these two men were highly important figures in Alaska's history who should be remembered and celebrated for their contributions on the road to statehood.

"I think they are some of the most important heroes along the way," Venables said. "One negotiated the purchase of Alaska. The other was a main force in having civil government."

Seward, secretary of state under Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, negotiated the purchase of Alaska from Russia for about 2 cents an acre in what some at the time called "Seward's Folly" or "Seward's Icebox."

Wickersham, a district judge for Alaska appointed by President William McKinley, was an important proponent for the Last Frontier whom many seem to know little about, Venables said. The Wickersham portion of the program is partially funded by a grant from the Alaska Humanities Forum's "We the People" program and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"He is described as the most important Alaska citizen of the



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In character: John Venables rehearses dialogue in character as Judge James Wickersham Thursday at Centennial Hall.

first third of the 20th Century," Venables said. "This man has been forgotten for the most part."

The re-enactments help bring their legacies to life, he said.

"They'll hear background on the characters, what they had to contend with in their lives, and what they contributed to Alaska continuing on the journey to statehood until the magic day occurred," he said.

The Alaska String Band will perform at the opening of the program, and local singer-songwriter Buddy Tabor will sing his song "House of Wickersham" between presentations.

John Venables has been visiting local schools on his visit to Juneau to bring more awareness of Alaska history. But tonight's program is for both adults and children, he said.