



Tundra Thistle

The Newsletter of the Alaskan Scottish Club

Volume 31 Number 4

Fourth Quarter 2025

Coming Events:

Irish Club Song Circle

Come join us for a Song Circle, Sing Around, Sing-a-Long, Sing Song or whatever you want to call it! Come lead a song, sing-a-long, request a favorite, or just listen while you have a drink, snack or work on your favorite craft. No theme this month. We will go around the circle and let everyone choose a song.

Thursday September 4th
6-8pm

New Sagaya City Market, in the Food Court
Downtown at 900 W 13th Ave.
FREE

Great parking, food or drink for purchase or bring your water bottle and song books. Stop by for a song or two or for the evening. This is a perfect location to grab dinner, too!

Celebrate Samhain With CCA

By Jocelyn Paine

Saturday, October 25 6-10 p.m.

Anchorage Senior Activity Center, 1300 E. 19th Ave.
Tickets at: www.akcelts.org or Eventbrite

As autumn winds down and the crisp night air invites us to gather close, the Celtic Community of Alaska (CCA) welcomes you to its 27th annual Samhain celebration—an evening of fire, music, memory, and discovery.

This year's theme, *A Passage to Discovery*, invites guests of all ages to explore Celtic traditions and symbolism in a vibrant, meaningful way. Whether you're a longtime lover of Celtic culture or simply curious, this event offers something for everyone.

What to Expect

Costume Contest: Come dressed in your Celtic best—or let your imagination run wild. Prizes and applause await.

Silent Auction: Support CCA's upcoming Celtic Spring Festival while bidding on unique items from local vendors.

Interactive Game: *A Passage to Discovery* is a self-guided adventure through nine Celtic symbols. Solve clues, learn lore, and help complete a Celtic knot design.

Music & Dance: Samhain is structured as a traditional *céilidh*—a social gathering filled with music and dancing. From the gentle strains of Irish harp to haunting folk songs sung *a cappella* by Dawn Berg, the evening's soundtrack is rich and diverse. Dance to the music of Lisa Maloney

and the Red Caps. Watch the Irish Dance Academy and Fireweed Fling light up the floor with high-energy jigs and graceful steps.

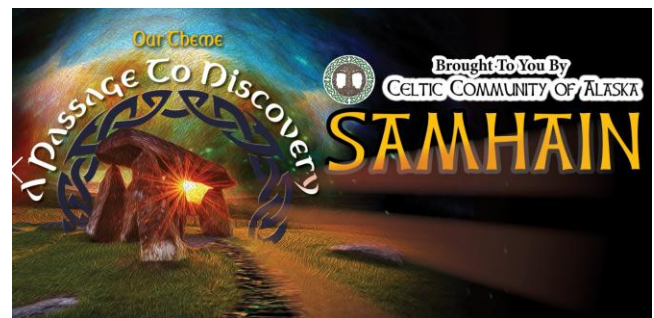
Food & Drink: Chef Will of Arctic Rose Catering will be serving up hearty Celtic-inspired fare at reasonable prices. A Celtic Sampler platter will be available, along with other themed meals. Beer and wine will be available for purchase—because no Celtic gathering is complete without a toast to *Auld Lang Syne*.

Honoring the Ancestors: Samhain marks a liminal time when the veil between worlds is thin. At the **Ancestors' Table**, guests are invited to share photos and favorite foods of loved ones who've passed. It's a quiet, powerful tradition that honors memory and connection.

Fire Ceremony: As night falls, Claire and the Samhain Fire Dancers lead the ceremonial lighting of the New Fire. Guests may write down wishes, regrets, or hopes for the coming year and cast them into the flames—a symbolic act of release and renewal.

Anne Freitag, the evening's "Fire Marshall," reflects, "Samhain is part of the circle of the year. We're on the downhill slide into winter and darkness. Samhain is more about community and remembrance than Halloween—more real."

Whether you're drawn by the music, the mystery, or the magic of the fire, Samhain offers a rare chance to connect—with culture, community, and the deeper rhythms of the season. Come curious. Leave inspired.



Fairbanks Red Hackles Pipe Band presents:

Not Burns Night

Join the Fairbanks Red Hackle Pipe Band for our Not Burns Night Celebration & Silent Auction on **Saturday, October 4** at Pike's Waterfront Lodge in the Bentley Room. Doors open at 5:30 PM, with the event kicking off at 6:00 PM.

Tickets \$29 each at [Not Burns Night | Fairbanks Red Hackle](#)



Graham leads the clan parade with a Historic Recrudescence Guild honor guard

Graham McTavish Brings Star Power and Scottish Soul to the ASHG

The Alaska Scottish Highland Games roared to life this past weekend at the Alaska State Fairgrounds in Palmer, and this year's celebration had an extra dose of cinematic charm thanks to the appearance of Scottish actor and author Graham McTavish—the 2025 Honorary Chieftain of the Games2.

Known for his iconic roles in *Outlander*, *The Hobbit*, and *Men in Kilts*, McTavish kicked off the festivities with a stirring welcome at the Opening Ceremonies on Saturday morning. Clad in full Highland regalia, he brought charisma, warmth, and a touch of Hollywood to the heart of Alaska's Mat-Su Valley.

A Weekend of Whisky, War Cries, and Warmth

Throughout the weekend, McTavish hosted exclusive tastings of his own label, *McTavish Spirits*, offering fans the rare chance to share a dram and hear behind-the-scenes stories from his storied career. His sessions were packed with laughter, heartfelt moments, and a genuine love for Scottish heritage.

"Alaska feels like a second home," McTavish told attendees. "The spirit here is wild, welcoming, and wonderfully Scottish."

Tradition Meets Thunder

The Games themselves were the largest in their 43-year history, featuring over 250 athletes competing in Heavy Athletics, the Kilted Mile, and the formidable Denali Stones Challenge. The new Open Format competition drew strength warriors from across North America, all vying for a \$10,000 prize purse.

Music That Shook the Mountains

The entertainment lineup was nothing short of electric. Tribal drum legends *Albannach* unleashed their fierce rhythms, *House of Hamill* brought fiddle-fueled folk rock,

and the *Harp Twins* with the *Volkgang Twins* delivered a Celtic-metal spectacle that had the crowd dancing and cheering all weekend long2.

Celtic Culture for All Ages

From the Haggis Eating Contest to the Midnight Sun Spurtle Challenge (yes, a porridge cook-off!), the Games offered something for everyone. Kids tossed mini cabers, adults sampled mead and whisky, and over 175 vendors filled the Celtic marketplace with kilts, swords, shortbread, and smiles.

A Star Among the Clans

McTavish's presence elevated the event from festive to unforgettable. Whether posing for photos, sharing stories, or simply strolling the grounds, he embodied the spirit of the Highland Games—pride, passion, and a deep connection to heritage.

As the bagpipes faded and the cabers settled, one thing was clear: the 2025 Alaska Scottish Highland Games weren't just a celebration—they were a moment in time, made magical by the presence of a true Scottish legend.

Slàinte mhath, Graham. Alaska will be waiting for your next visit.



Miss Alaska, Suparat Prasannet and Miss Northern Lights Becca Sewell pose with Crow Creek Pipes and Drums

Thank You, Volunteers!

The 2025 Scottish Highland Games, both in Palmer and in Fairbanks, were a roaring success—and it wouldn't have been possible without YOU.

To every volunteer who lifted, organized, welcomed, directed, cheered, cleaned, poured, piped, danced, and smiled through it all: **thank you** from the bottom of our tartan-clad hearts.

Your energy, dedication, and generosity brought this celebration to life. Whether you were behind the scenes or front and center, your contribution made a lasting impact on our community and helped preserve the spirit of the Highland Games under Alaska's endless summer sky.

We are proud, grateful, and lucky to have you in our clan. Here's to tradition, teamwork, and the magic we create together.

More Games Photos
Page 9



Pipe Bands from across the state converged on Fairbanks and filled the venue with music throughout the day

First Ever Midnight Sun Scottish Highland Games 2025:

A Celebration of Strength, Spirit, and Sunshine

Under Alaska's radiant summer skies, the 2025 Midnight Sun Scottish Highland Games delivered a spectacular celebration of tradition, athleticism, and community. With the sun lingering late into the evening, attendees soaked up every moment of this high-energy event that brought Scottish heritage to life in true northern style.

From the thunderous caber toss to the crowd-favorite tug-of-war, athletes gave it their all in classic Highland events. Spectators cheered as competitors hurled stones, swung hammers, and raised the bar—literally and figuratively. The field was alive with tartan pride and fierce camaraderie.

Bagpipes echoed across the grounds as pipe bands marched proudly, setting the tone for a day filled with Celtic rhythm and Highland dancers wowed the crowd with their grace and precision, and cultural booths offered hands-on experiences—from tartan weaving to genealogy tips. Whether Scottish by ancestry or simply by enthusiasm, everyone found a way to connect with the culture.



Falconers demonstrate their bird's capabilities at the Midnight Sun Scottish Highland Games

Festival-goers enjoyed hearty fare like meat pies, fish and chips, and even adventurous bites of haggis. Local vendors served up cold brews and warm smiles, while artisan booths offered Celtic crafts and keepsakes.

The magic of the Midnight Sun added a special glow to the festivities, making this year's games feel timeless. As one attendee put it, "It's like stepping into a living story—where tradition meets joy and the sun never quite sets."

From the athletes to the volunteers, musicians to vendors, and every guest who came to cheer and celebrate, the 2025 Midnight Sun Scottish Highland Games were a resounding success. Here's to tartan, tradition, and the unforgettable light of summer.



Over 70 athletes competed in the first-ever Fairbanks Highland Games!

We Want to Hear From You!

As we prepare for next year's Highland Games, we're reaching out to our community—because your voice matters.

Whether you've got a brilliant idea, a lingering concern, or just a suggestion to make the games even better, we'd love to hear it. From caber toss logistics to vendor vibes, every detail counts—and your input helps shape an unforgettable experience.

Drop us a message, send an email, or chat with a board member at the next club meeting. Let's make this year's Highland Games the best yet—together. Contact info is on page 7.

Scotch, Bourbon and Mead Tasting a Hit at the Games

By Tonda Scott

It was a great year for tastings this year. All who attended experienced some great blends of Scotch and Mead. And of course, there was a lot of excitement at the games knowing Graham McTavish was having a special tasting to promote his Bourbon and to listen to him talk about his career.

Sad to say that ticket sales for Graham's tastings sold out very quickly after placing the event online. Some individuals were disappointed that they couldn't purchase a ticket the day of the event. That should give you more reason to purchase tickets online early for all future tasting events!

Much thanks goes to Allocated with the generous sponsorship of Graham's Bourbon tasting. If you were unable to attend his event, you may be able to find the Bourbon at Allocated. Give them a call!

The Beard Brothers have been coming from Fairbanks for the past few years to share their Mead. They had one tasting each day during the games and each tasting was sold out. Thankfully, they were able to add a few tables and chairs to accommodate a few attendees that really wanted to attend. Thanks go to the Beard Brothers!! They do have some good Mead. If you haven't tasted it yet, be sure to come next year!

Stay tuned for what we will be doing at the tastings for 2026. Check our Web Site in the Spring so you can purchase your tickets as soon as the ticket sales are open to reserve your seat. Tastings fill up fast.

Fairbanks Games Tastings

Fairbanks held their inaugural Highland Games this year. There was a great turnout and so many Fairbanks ASC members stepped up to make it happen! Great job!



Dave of Beard Brothers Meadery hosts the Mead tasting event

The games wouldn't have been complete though without Scotch and Mead tasting events! There was one tasting for Mead and one tasting for Scotch. When the ticket sales were placed online, they were sold out almost immediately. There were individuals that stood outside in hopes they could purchase a last-minute ticket and attend. Sorry to say that not everyone could attend due to limited space.

Much thanks to the Beard Brothers for supplying several flavors of Mead. No one left disappointed in what they tasted. If interested in tasting more of their Mead products,

you are encouraged to go to their business in Fairbanks. I have a few favorites!

The Scotch tasting had several blends of Scotch. An ambassador from out of state was available to provide education on each blend that was tasted. Thanks go out to Brown Jug in providing the Scotch and their sponsorship of the event. It was stated by the Brown Jug staff and the ambassador that they had a limited amount of the blends currently, so if you wanted to purchase more, you had better do so soon!

Membership Updates

By Tonda Scott

The Palmer games and the Inaugural Midnight Sun games are in the books! A lot of time and effort went into planning both games for several months by many individuals.

What has also been noticed was the increase in memberships this year! The membership committee has been busy adding new members and updating information on existing members to the spreadsheet. The membership spreadsheet indicates we have 395 members of which come from all over the state as well as the lower 48. With the plan to have the inaugural Midnight Sun Game, there was an increase in membership from Fairbanks, Healy and North Pole. Currently there are 61 members from that region! Good job! I'm sure it will only increase in the future.

Just as a reminder, there were changes at the general membership meeting in March. One was the change to include a "business membership". If you want more information on how to become a business member, please contact a board member.

The second change was the length of the grace period before you are moved from the active member spreadsheet to the archived spreadsheet. You now only have three months of which to renew your membership instead of six months. After that time, you will not receive the Tundra Thistle or emails that contain updates on events with the club or other perks that members receive. If you are unsure when your membership expires, do not hesitate to contact us. An update to the website provides an option for members to make ongoing annual membership payments. You can discontinue that option at any time.

There were a few questions from sponsors this year about their memberships. Sponsors do receive one year's membership with their sponsorship. If you sponsored the Palmer games in 2025, your membership would have a date from June 2025 to June 2026. If you were a new sponsor of the Inaugural Fairbanks games, your membership will be from August 2025 to August of 2026. Hopefully you will continue to sponsor in 2026 as sponsorships help keep the games going.

As always, if you have any questions, ideas or comments on improving membership and membership activities, please contact the board!

One More Games for the Season:

**Kelso Highlander Festival
and Scottish Games**

September 13 & 14, 2025 Kelso Wa
FREE ADMISSION!!



- Food
- Music
- Highland Games
- Dance Competition
- Beer Garden
- Craft Vendors
- Silent Auction
- Parade
- Special Entertainment
- FUN!!

Wicked Tinkers

- www.facebook.com/highlanderfestival
- www.kelsohighlanderfestival.com

When you are thinking of American towns with a wee bit O' Scotland, you may not readily think of the Pacific Northwest, but that is just where you will find a bit of a hidden gem in the small town of Kelso, Washington. Nestled perfectly in the space where three rivers all meet, Kelso has purely Scottish roots and the personality to go with it. When Scottish surveyor Peter Crawford made his way to the Great Pacific Northwest in 1847, he would eventually find, claim, and settle what he thought to be the perfect plot of land. He would name it after his hometown, Kelso, Scotland.

Resting in the shadows of the infamous Mt. St. Helens and just an hour-long drive from either the mighty Pacific Ocean, the majestic Gifford Pinchot National Forest, or the eclectic Portland Oregon, this little town offers much to see and do if you are ever fortunate enough to be in southwest Washington. Kelso was once famous for the many brothels and taverns that catered to the early loggers and mill workers in neighboring Longview, many of whom made their homes in Kelso and many others who saw it as a favorite port of call along the mighty Columbia and Cowlitz Rivers. Kelso has always held to and been proud of its Scottish



roots. To this day, it celebrates its heritage in various ways including the annual Scottish festival and traditional Highland games.

The city's current iteration of the Kelso Highlander Festival began in 1962 as a summer event to replace the Kon Tiki raft races that were held on the nearby Cowlitz River in earlier years. Ten years later, at the 1972 festival, a bagpipe

band was featured, laying the groundwork for subsequent years. The Highland Games made their first appearance at the 1976 festival. Over the years, the Highlander Festival has expanded its features and grown in popularity, offering something for everyone.

Held in Kelso's beautiful Tam O'Shanter Park, today's festival boasts:

Traditional Highland Games: Competitive strength events such as Cabre Toss, Hammer Throw, Sheaf Toss, and much more.

Highland Dance Competition: Highlighting traditional Scottish dance.

Parade: A parade through town and ending inside the event at the park. Parade showcases Kelso's heritage and culture

Kelso Garden Club Flower Show: A display of local floral art

Kirkin' of the Tartan Worship Service: A religious service celebrating Scottish culture.

Entertainment: This year's entertainment includes the world-famous Wicked Tinkers with their tribal sounds, Beltaine, and AML trio, each with their own spin on historical Scottish and Irish shanties.

Clan Row: Clans line up with their booths to share their history and even help you find out where your name potentially fits in with Scottish clan history.

Craft Vendors: Countless local sellers offering their wares for your purchase!

Food Vendors: A nice variety of foods to feed the belly.

Beer Garden: What festival is complete without a space to quench the thirst?

So, plan ahead. Clear your calendar and schedule your trip to the coolest little Scottish town and festival you will find in the Pacific Northwest. While you are here, reserve some time to see all the other things that Kelso and the surrounding area have to offer. The festival runs Saturday and Sunday, September 13 and 14, 2025. Parking and admission are both free, as is the entertainment on both days. For more information, find our website at www.kelsohighlanderfestival.com and follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/highlanderfestival. When you get here, please stop by the information booth to let us know where you are visiting from. We cannot wait to meet you and show you a little of our culture.



Contact Information for Alaska Pipe Bands:

Crow Creek Pipes & Drums

Practice every Monday, 6:00 p.m.
First Congregational Church, 2610 E Northern lights Blvd
Piping and Drumming lessons Tuesday 6-7pm
Contact Chris Walker at aeWalker@mtaonline.net for further information. <http://crowcreekpd.com/>

Fairbanks Red Hackle Pipe Band

P.O. 82782
Fairbanks, Alaska
www.fairbanksredhacklepipeband.org

Alaska Celtic Pipes & Drums

Lessons Tuesdays - 6:30 pm - Mat-Su College;
Lessons Fridays - 5:30 pm - Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Chugiak: Band Practice to follow.
Contact Richard Christiansen - 907-315-9838
www.alaskacelticpipesdrums.org

Anchorage Scottish Pipe Band

Practices Monday, 6:00 to 8:00pm (Anchorage) and Thursday, 6:30 to 8:30pm (Eagle River)
Lessons: Thursdays, 6:00pm (Eagle River), or by appointment
Contact: Kerry MacMillan Howard, 907-250-3459;
Email: arcticmac@gci.net
Find us on Facebook

City of Juneau Pipe Band

Juneau, Alaska
www.cityofjuneaupipeband.org

Scottish Club Supporters/Club Contacts

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Club Information

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Go online to www.alaskanscottish.org and click the membership link, Mail a check to ASC, PO Box 244416, Anchorage, AK 99524 or Call 907-602-0901 and provide payment information.

Scholarship Program

The Alaskan Scottish Club Education Assistance Program offers individual grants up to \$500 per applicant for schools or workshops and up to \$1,500 for a post-secondary educational institution. See the club's website for more information and to access the application <https://alaskanscottish.org/club-membership/>

If you have any questions regarding the program, please contact Committee chair, Christa Wallace at Volunteers@alaskanscottish.org

Back Issues of the Thistle

Ever wanted to check out old issues of the Thistle? Maybe to find that steak pie recipe from two years ago, or see who won the tug-o-war at last year's Games? Back issues may be found on our website under the "Tundra Thistle" tab.

Gaming Permit

The ASC possesses an Alaska Gaming Permit. This Permit allows the club to hold our fundraising raffles and auctions. The ASC is allowed to use our permit to sponsor raffles for other Non-Profits for their events and fundraisers. If you are in need of a gaming permit for an upcoming event please let us know.

Support the Club through EZBiz



The Club can earn airline miles at the same time you earn your own! The Easy Biz program allows the club to earn 1 mile for every dollar spent on the base fare portion of ticket purchases made online through the EasyBiz® website. Simply sign in to EasyBiz for your travel purchases and each purchase will automatically be credited to the Club's account along with your own! Interested in signing up? Send Jeni an email and she will get you on our account! jeni@alaskanscottish.org

Club Contact Information

The Tundra Thistle, the newsletter of the Alaskan Scottish Club, is published approximately 4 times each year. Subscription is by membership to the Alaskan Scottish Club. Send articles for publication, membership info, and advertising rate inquiries to:

Editor, Tundra Thistle, Alaskan Scottish Club, Inc.
P.O. Box 244416 Anchorage, AK 99524-4416

Thanks to our contributors for the September issue: Jeni McDaniel, Dawn Berg, Jocelyn Paine and Tonda Scott.

Photos by

Alaskan Scottish Club

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Board Members Emeritus: Robert J. Dickson, Rod Finkle, Tim Kincaid

The Alaskan Scottish Club is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) entity and can accept cash and services. Cash donations are welcome at any time of the year. For those with corporate matching programs, we are eligible for those funds. You can contact the Board of Directors at the above address with questions. Facebook and Instagram contacts are:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/AlaskanScottish (Club page) www.facebook.com/alaskashq (Highland Games page)

Instagram: www.instagram.com/alaskanscottish

Club Calendar

Date	Time	Event	Location	Details
Every month				
3rd Monday	6:00 p.m.	Scottish Club Board Meeting	Blood Bank of Alaska Board Room	Open to Club members
September				
4	6–8 p.m.	Irish Club Song Circle	New Sagaya City Market, Food Court	Free & open to all
October				
4	Doors open at 5:30	Not Burns Night	Pike's Waterfront Lodge, Fairbanks	Fundraiser for Red Hackles Pipe Band
25	6–10 p.m.	CCA Samhain Celebration	Anchorage Senior Activity Center	Tickets at akcelts.org or Eventbrite
November				
TBD	5 - 7 p.m.	St. Andrew's Night	King Street Brewing Company	Celebrate Scotland's patron saint
January				
17	6-10 p.m.	Burns Night	49 th State Brewery	Poetry, haggis & whisky
June				
13	3 pm start	Tartan Tourney	Settler's Bay Go9lf Course	Register online at www.alaskascottish.org
27-28	All day	Alaska Scottish Highland Games	AK State Fairgrounds, Palmer	Registrations open early 2026
July				
4	All day	Kachemak Bay Highland Games	Karen Hornaday	Coastal games with a Celtic twist
August				
15	All day	Midnight Sun Highland Games	AK Dog Musher's Assoc. Musher's Hall	Celebrate under the midnight sun

Games Photo Log



Judges rate the porridge prepared in the Midnight Sun Spurtle Challenge



Graham calls in the clans



ASL Interpreter describes the Beard, Braid and Mustache competition



Jade, the Highland Cow, charms her visitors



Blacksmith from Palmer Folk School demonstrates his art



New Club member Marilyn Russell learns what Games volunteering is all about – as she chooses which of 24 shortbreads are winners



Highland Dancers prepare for the sword dance



A record number of athletes competed in the 2025 Alaska Scottish Highland Games in Palmer

Who won? How'd they do?

View Heavy Athletic Event scores from Alaska Scottish Highland Games, Kachemak Bay Highland Games, and the Midnight Sun Scottish Highland Games here:

<https://scottishscores.com/>