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PHOTOS BY JAMES H. BARKER/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## A museum exhibit converts activity in the Alaskan environment into an ever changing sound show

By Amy Mayer  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — Having once lived in Fairbanks, my appreciation for Alaska's second-largest city is grounded in details many visitors never experience: vibrant potluck dinners in wood-heated cabins, the colossal vegetables produced during the short but light-filled growing season, and the dazzling displays of the aurora borealis on cold, dark nights.

Most tourists come here in summer. And while you cannot fully know Fairbanks until you have experienced ice-encrusted eyelashes, it is now possible to get a greater sense of place through a new sound and light installation at the University of Alaska Museum of the North. "The Place Where You Go to Listen" channels the environment — including the green streaks of the northern lights in the sky and the tiny, almost daily, earthquakes that rumble through the ground — and offers it up in mu-

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New Yorkers Gabriel Voiles and Sara Yu contemplate "The Place Where You Go to Listen" installation at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, left, on the Fairbanks campus.



ILLUSTRATION/TATSURO KIUCHI

## See the world *and* save the planet

By Diane Daniel  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

One of the first things Michele Davis does when she travels to a new city is look for a place to put her recyclables. She even has a photo collection of recycling bins from across Europe.

"They look kind of space age," she said. "Once, when I couldn't find any, I took home five empty bottles on the plane. My husband was horrified."

Davis, 44, of Newton, is known among friends and neighbors as the "recycling queen." She heads the local recycling committee and recently became the town's representative to the Green Decade Coalition Kyoto Project, helping residents identify what to do in their homes and lives to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and be more climate friendly.

You could also call her a composting devotee, in that she oversees three bins, one of them indoors. Composting on the road, she notes, is a little trickier.

"I've buried compost at places we've rented," she said.

Despite her passion and practices, Davis, like most other travelers, admits she never has scouted out environmentally friendly hotels and services when planning a vacation, or afterward given hotel management any feedback.

Bob Henault, 46, of Mansfield, and Betty Gilson, 77, of Bridgewater, share Davis's experience. Both their families are concerned with recycling, composting, and energy use — at home. But when they're on the road, they become what could be called passive environmentalists.

"We'll do it if it's an option," Henault said. "Like if there's cards in the room with an option of not having the towels washed." But he does not refuse daily maid and linen service.

Gilson, who drives a Prius, sometimes travels with her husband on group tours. She has never asked a tour operator about their environmental practices, although she's always happy to see them offered. "I haven't really thought about it," said Gilson.

Davis, Henault, and Gilson are all model "good cit-

PRINCIPLES, Page M6



ERIK JACOBS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## Explore New England

Fifties and '60s music reigns at Johnny Rockets in Providence, home to several colleges and one of the stops on a 24-hour, four-state tour of college towns. Also, considering UMass's flagship Amherst campus as a getaway destination. **M7**

**24 HOURS IN A MOUSE CLICK**  
A photo gallery of campuses and their communities on [explorenewengland.com](http://explorenewengland.com).

# Translating the sounds of nature

► **ALASKA**  
Continued from Page M1

sical and visual interpretations.

Aldona Jonaitis, director of the museum, commissioned John Luther Adams, the avant garde composer and a Fairbanks resident, to create the installation for the striking and newly renovated facility, which has doubled in size thanks to a \$42 million capital campaign. "I said it would be wonderful if we could have something communicate the sense of place of Alaska through sound," Jonaitis said.

**WHERE YOU GO TO SEE**  
A photo gallery of Museum of the North at [boston.com/travel](http://boston.com/travel).

As you enter the relatively small, irregular space that houses "The Place Where You Go to Listen," sound embraces you the way warm air wraps around chilly limbs as you step inside from the cold. Initially, you hear one steady sound that's pleasing without being terribly engaging. As you acclimate, you notice two bars of light on one wall that gradually change color. Then the sound captures and holds your attention. It is diverse, constantly changing, and utterly unpredictable.

Adams, 53, is a committed environmentalist whose compositions for orchestras, solo percussionists, and other groups reflect the influence of American minimalist composers Morton Feldman and John Cage. After growing up on the East Coast, Adams has lived in Alaska for more than 30 years and his affinity for the Alaska Native population has prompted him to include their language and songs in his work. "The Place Where You Go to Listen" is the literal translation of the Inupiaq place name Naalagiagvik, which refers to a sacred location on Alaska's Arctic coast.

This is Adams's first museum

## If you go . . .

### University of Alaska Museum of the North

907 Yukon Drive (on campus)  
Fairbanks  
907-474-7505  
[www.uaf.edu/museum](http://www.uaf.edu/museum)  
Sept. 16-May 14: Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m., weekends noon-5; May 15-Sept. 15: — 9-7 daily. Effective May 1 adults \$10, seniors 60 and older \$9, youths ages 7-17 \$5.

### Tanana Valley State Fair

Aug. 4-12  
1800 College Road, Fairbanks  
907-452-3750  
[www.tananavalleyfair.org](http://www.tananavalleyfair.org)  
Camping adjacent to the fairgrounds is available all summer for RVs and tents.

installation. "This is a whole new medium for me. And it requires a whole new way of working," he said.

Drawing on years of interviews with scientists in various fields, Adams selected five natural events to audibly illustrate: earthquakes, the aurora borealis, the positions of the sun and the moon, and sky conditions.

His collaborators include geologists and physicists who constantly monitor earthquakes and gather data on changes to the earth's magnetic field associated with aurora activity. They share that data, sending it to a computer inside the installation. That computer also runs a program that continuously calculates the positions of the sun and the moon relative to the exhibit's spot on the earth. The weather information also arrives in real time.

The data streams through musical filters Adams designed for each natural phenomenon. He de-

scribes the undertaking as mapping a sonic landscape. During daylight, visitors hear what Adams calls the day choir. As the moon rises, it contributes what he thinks of as a solo voice. Instruments at five seismic stations send in data and whenever one measures a tremor, visitors inside the exhibit hear the intensity and duration of the quake as very low-frequency drum sounds. Aurora borealis activity sends a layer of bell-like tones floating through the air.

Fourteen speakers and a vast range of frequencies provide a rich audio experience for anyone who enters the room. It won't reproduce over the radio or Internet, so you've got to be there to hear it. Return a half hour after your first visit, and the sounds will have changed — only slightly if the natural world hasn't changed much, quite dramatically if in your absence the sun has set or the aurora has become active. The lighting takes on blue and violet tones at night, in contrast with daytime's red and orange.

Some early visitors — "The Place Where You Go to Listen" opened March 21, the spring equinox — described the music as "meditative."

Kyle Gann, former Village Voice music critic, has long followed Adams's work and traveled to Alaska for the opening. He says the installation is different from others he has experienced because it's constantly changing and even the composer never knows exactly what it will sound like.

"It's really kind of a metaphor," Gann said. "There's the sensuous side — anyone can just walk in and enjoy it without knowing what they're hearing. But the other is the cognitive side of it — which is knowing what is causing all the sounds — and there's something poetic about that."

Some visitors have said the

composer's note mounted on the wall of the installation doesn't sufficiently explain the scientific data behind the music. But Adams says he has heard from people who say they don't want more information because the experience of being surrounded by the sounds is complete on its own. He insists that what he has created is art, not a science project.

"In 'The Place Where You Go to Listen,' what I aspired to was a kind of musical ecosystem," Adams said. "A work of art, an imaginary world, if you will, that is directly connected to the real world in which we live and resonates sympathetically with that world and with the forces of nature."

Jonaitis says "The Place Where You Go to Listen" contributes to the sense of place she's trying to evoke from the moment visitors first see the museum.

"The outside of the building is inspired by ice," she said. "But people see plate tectonics and glaciers and diving wells, they see a lot of things in the outside of the building." ("Igloo" might also leap to mind from the white blocks of the construction.) Inside, Jonaitis says the layout of the new Rose Berry Alaska Art Gallery is also designed to foster that sense of place. Its main doors are adjacent to the listening exhibit. Jonaitis says the large gallery, which is scheduled to open May 1, will show Alaska Native art alongside landscape paintings by other artists. Jewelry and quilts will be on display, too. She says she doesn't want "native art" or "crafts" to be segregated the way they are in some museums.

Another installation commissioned by the museum pokes fun at a common housing peculiarity in Fairbanks: Many of the 80,000 people in the metropolitan area live in cabins that do not have indoor plumbing. A designer out-house pays them tribute.



JAMES H. BARKER/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The newly renovated University of Alaska Museum of the North in Fairbanks gets 80 percent of its visitors in summer.

"We really wanted to show people that outhouses are part of the sense of place," Jonaitis said. "But also, it's a very funny piece, and we want people to go to a museum and be surprised and laugh because museums ought to be fun as well as serious."

Jonaitis says the University of Alaska Museum of the North welcomes 80 percent of its visitors during the summer and the vast majority of them are from out of state. Still, after living in Alaska for more than 10 years, Jonaitis knows a trek to the subarctic can be a tough sell.

"I'm from New York City and most people from my part of the world — or just about any part of

the United States and the world — would think that there couldn't be very much 150 miles south of the Arctic Circle," she said. "Fairbanks is really a major artistic center and there's really a lot of stuff going on here. There's a lot of creativity here."

And if you do want to see a gigantic cabbage or zucchini, be sure to schedule your visit to Fairbanks during the first weeks of August, when the growers of giant vegetables compete at the Tanana Valley State Fair.

Contact Amy Mayer, a freelance writer in Shutesbury, at [amymh\\_mayer@gmail.com](mailto:amymh_mayer@gmail.com).

# An ice museum and hot springs that soothe

Continued from preceding page

cheered the Fairbanks All-Stars, who came from behind to beat the Alaska Goldpanners in the last inning. The pitcher's shadow stretched halfway to first base.

Nice, but where was the Alaska of gold fever? Felix Pedro discovered gold here in 1902, and boomtown Fairbanks sprang to life. I signed on for a tour of the El Dorado Gold Mine in nearby Fox. Ian McGregor, the parking attendant, said, "It's named for a mythical place of gold."

Earl Hughes, a tour guide, came to Alaska on what has become a 30-year detour to the Grand Ole Opry. He fiddled for us aboard the narrow gauge train — "The Tennessee Waltz" and "Mosquito Breakdown" — and recounted the history of gold mining, an active industry even today. We stopped in a permafrost tunnel to watch a mining actor-interpreter explore bedrock.

"Why do miners dig in winter, wash in summer?" Hughes asked, then answered his own question. "Miners dig mine shafts making use of the permafrost for scaffolding, thus dig in winter. In the summer, they use gold pans to catch sluice water and swish for gold, thus wash in summer. Gold, 19 times heavier than water, stays put if you slosh the pan just right."

It was summer, so we played at washing. I swished and tilted until



ERIC ENGMAN/FAIRBANKS DAILY NEWS-MINER VIA AP

Sandhill cranes, which migrate to Fairbanks in spring, spar while feeding at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge.

only gold flecks remained in the pan, valued at \$35 and mine to keep.

At public screenings of films featuring Alaska, Terrence Cole, a professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, taught Alaskan history and debunked stereotypes perpetrated in films. He supplied commentary, corrections, and humor on every topic, and sometimes referred to cheechakos (chee-CHA-kohs).

"What's a cheechako?" I asked a nearby student.

It means "You're not from here, you're a newcomer," Maggie

Billington, a retired administrator from nearby Ester, said with a laugh. We followed her directions and had no trouble finding the Golden Eagle Saloon. Monique Musick, the bartender, sized us up as cheechakos and poured us the \$3 Alaskan brew (the locals quaffed \$1 brews).

Musick has always lived in Ester and juggles three jobs: bartender, photographer, and production manager for Mushing: The Magazine of Dog-Powered Adventure.

"I remember as a kid going to the Lower 48 one summer and

seeing stars," she said. "I'd never seen stars when it was warm. I couldn't figure it out."

Still eager for wilderness, we drove the beautiful 56-mile Chena Hot Springs Road, through the Chena River State Recreation Area. We traveled at the same speed as a gull flying overhead, passing beaver lodges, a pair of tundra swans, miles of black spruce reflected in the river, and patches of charred trees, a reminder of last summer's forest fire, to Chena Hot Springs Resort and the Aurora Ice Museum, which claims to be the country's first ice hotel.

We soaked in the rock-rimmed outdoor pool of nearby Chena Hot Springs. The 100-degree mineral water has been said to cure everything that aches since it was put on the map in 1912, and was used by the indigenous people long before that.

I settled into the water, content under the midnight sun. I had found the true Alaska. I flew in from "outside" and had a good time hanging out with locals and visitors. The midnight sun gave everyone double time and energy to follow pleasures in the long summer light. Residents of Alaska's Golden Heart City have a deal and they know it.

Contact Molly Lynn Watt, a freelance writer in Cambridge, at [mollywatt@comcast.net](mailto:mollywatt@comcast.net).

## If you go . . .

### Where to stay

**Chena Hot Springs Resort**  
Chena Hot Springs Road, mile 56.5  
907-451-8104; 800-478-4681  
[www.chenahotspings.com](http://www.chenahotspings.com)  
Rooms \$120-\$220, backpacker cabins (no running water) \$65-\$200, three-person yurt \$65, camping \$20. To see the hot springs, take the Steese Highway north. At mile 4.6 turn right onto Chena Hot Springs Road.

### What to do

**Large Animal Research Station University of Alaska Fairbanks**  
907 Yankovich Road  
907-474-7207, [www.uaf.edu/lars](http://www.uaf.edu/lars)  
Tours of musk ox, caribou, and reindeer. Daily Memorial Day-Labor Day, 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. Adults \$10, seniors \$9, students \$6, under 7 free.

### Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge

1300 College Road at Danby Road  
907-452-5162  
Trails always open. Farmhouse visitors center daily in summer 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Free, but donations accepted. Free guided nature walks through August, Wednesday and Saturday 9 a.m., Tuesday and Thursday 7 p.m.

### Growden Memorial Park

Wilbur Street and 2nd Avenue  
[www.goldpanners.com](http://www.goldpanners.com)  
See an Alaska Baseball League game in June or July.

### El Dorado Gold Mine

Elliott Highway at mile 1.3, Fox  
866-479-6673; 907-479-6673  
Tours daily 9:45 a.m. and 3 p.m., Saturday 3 p.m. only. Adults \$28, children \$20. Take the Steese Highway (Route 6) north from Fairbanks.

### Where to eat

#### Ester Gold Camp and Malemute Saloon

Main Street, Ester  
907-479-2500; 800-354-7274  
[www.akvisit.com/ester.html](http://www.akvisit.com/ester.html)  
[www.akvisit.com/malemute.html](http://www.akvisit.com/malemute.html)  
Daily buffet 5-9 p.m. Adults \$18; children \$9. Buffet dinner with crab, adults \$30; children \$16.

The Malemute Saloon Stage Show "Service With a Smile," nightly at 9. Adults \$15; children \$7.50. From Fairbanks, take Parks Highway south and watch for sign at mile 351.7.

#### Hot Licks Ice Cream

3453 College Road  
907-479-7813  
[www.hotlicks.net](http://www.hotlicks.net)  
Nearly 100 flavors of ice cream, sorbet, and frozen yogurt. Cones \$1.60-\$4, ice cream cakes \$20-\$120, bulk ice cream \$4.75 a pint.

#### Information

#### Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau

550 1st Ave.  
907-456-4636  
[www.explorefairbanks.com](http://www.explorefairbanks.com)



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