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APPEASING THE SPIRITS RARE ALASKAN ARTIFACTS DIRECT FROM RUSSIA AT THE BATA SHOE MUSEUM

TORONTO, ONTARIO – May 12, 2004 – The Bata Shoe Museum is pleased to announce a spectacular new exhibition *Appeasing the Spirits: Alaskan Coastal Cultures* opening to the public on May 13th, 2004. Alaska is a land of incredible diversity, both environmental and cultural, and for Alaska's Eskimoan peoples, this natural abundance has been at the center of their spiritual, cultural and material life for thousands of years. This exhibition will explore their creative and determined adaptation of the gifts of land and sea through their rich and nuance material culture that continues to have meaning and purpose today.

The guest curators for this exhibition are Professor Jill Oakes, Acting Head of the Department of Environment and Geography and Professor Rick Riewe of the Department of Zoology at the University of Manitoba. In addition, both are Research Associates at the Canadian Circumpolar Institute and together they have been researching circumpolar peoples for many years and have conducted numerous field trips for the Bata Shoe Museum. Their research in Alaska and their interchange with Alaskan Coastal peoples was the inspiration for this exhibition. Drs. Oakes and Riewe bring to this exhibition a deep understanding and appreciation of Alaskan material culture as well as a history of successful curatorial collaboration with the Bata Shoe Museum.

Another exciting component of this exhibition are the artifacts on loan from the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, many of which have never been seen outside of Russia. Collected when Alaska was in Russian possession, these rare artifacts will tell the story of first European contact. Matching this important Russian material will be the Bata Shoe Museum's own impressive Alaskan collection.

Highlights of this exhibition include impressive Aleutian bentwood hunting hats, finely woven Aleutian grass socks, Central Yupik fish skin and bird skin clothing, number of superb Central Yupik and Siberian Yup'ik intestine parkas, utilitarian yet symbolic women's tools, Shishmaref beaded boots and Point Hope footwear made for whaling festivals. The voices of contemporary Alaskan seamstresses will also add a layer of meaning to the public's understanding and appreciation of Eskimoan material culture.

From the rare Russian artifacts to the compelling contemporary Alaskan stories, this exhibition will be a memorable experience and a learning opportunity for all ages and interests about the history and contemporary lives of Alaska's Eskimoan peoples.

Appeasing the Spirits will be on display until May 2005.

With an international collection of over 12,000 pairs of shoes and related artifacts, The Bata Shoe Museum celebrates style and function of footwear spanning 4,500 years of history in four distinct galleries. Other exhibitions currently on display – *PATHS ACROSS THE PLAINS: Traditional Footwear from the Great Plains*; *STARSTRUCK: A Celebrity Shoe Soiree*; and *ALL ABOUT SHOES: Footwear Through the Ages*. Visit our website at www.batashoemuseum.ca.