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**Arctic Belle Boutique**

By K.J. Lincoln

It has been a dream to own her own clothing shop ever since she was a young girl said Kate McWilliams of Bethel. Her dream has come true with the Arctic Belle Boutique.

The Arctic Belle Boutique is a ladies consignment store featuring lightly used attire for all sizes and ages. There are outfits, tops, skirts and dresses, accessories, shoes, heels, headwear, and treasures of all kinds.

She celebrated the grand opening of her shop on November 22nd, 2014.

McWilliams is a 2014 Best in the West winner, having successfully completed all the requirements for the contest. For her efforts she was awarded $3000 to help start her business.

“I had been planning to open a consignment store and this summer my mom told me about the Best in the West competition,” she said. “She sent me an application and so I filled it out and I attended workshops and I got a lot of positive feedback from people around town. When the competition came I was awarded grant money and that’s helped a lot with setting the place up.”

The very unique Best in the West competition supports local YK delta entrepreneurs with cash awards. It is an excellent opportunity to build small businesses in the YK region and promote jobs and economic stability. A partnership of organizations helped with this year’s competition - KUC/YPCC, Bethel Community Services Foundation, First National Bank, Donlin Creek LLC, Calista, Bethel Native Corporation, Kuskokwim Art Guild, and the Association of Village Council Presidents.

So what does Kate do when she is not busy working at her boutique? Well, she is still in high school and has not yet turned 18. She is active in student government and participates in sports. She has had fun in Native Youth Olympics, cross country, basketball, and volleyball.

And she also is an actress – she had a role in the recent student production of “Strange Borders”.

“I love doing this so much,” said McWilliams. “My sister and I, we’ve always been thrifty vintage shoppers and we’ve had this dream of opening our own boutique but that was always like way in the future.”

During her family’s yard sale this summer, McWilliams had a blast putting up displays for clothing and other stuff and was inspired with great ideas for her own store.

“I thought, this really isn’t so impossible, I don’t have to wait until I’m an adult, I can do this now,” she said.

How does it work?

“People bring their clothes to me and they get an account, so whatever their clothes sell for they get 40% of that and 60% goes to the store,” said McWilliams. “You can clean out your closet and make room for more clothes.”

As a senior at Bethel Regional High School, Kate plans to go to college after graduation, but her business will still be open for customers with the help of family and friends. To find the Arctic Belle Boutique, drive down 6th Avenue, take a left on Setter and follow the signs. It is open Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 6. She also has a website at arcticbelleboutique.com and you can follow her on Facebook.