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Swoosh free-throw winner heads to Shootout

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When 16-year old Dewayne Dirks of Point Hope stepped up to the free throw line, he didn't know his shot would land him, and his mother, a basketball lover's dream trip to Anchorage.

But it did, and now the pair is heading south to watch the 2015 Great Alaskan Shootout next week.

Dirks was one of the dozens of community members across the North Slope who participated in the Swoosh free throw competition, sponsored by the regional telecommunications company, ASTAC (Arctic Slope Telephone Association Cooperative.)

"We developed a basketball-themed competition that everybody could participate in and have an opportunity to win," said Jodi Forsland, chief communications officer.

The company travels to each of the Slope communities and holds an event that's open to everyone age two and up.

There's a special basketball toss challenge for the youngest participants, ages two to six, and regular free throws for all the rest.

"It gets all the community out. We have the elders all the way down to the 2-year-olds," said Forsland. "Basketball is fun in the villages. We were trying to pick something that everybody would participate in and enjoy it. We've had huge success with this."

It's a way of touching base with the communities the company serves, said Forsland, while encouraging healthy activities for people of all ages.

The winner from each village gets entered into a drawing for the grand prize trip to the Shootout.

This year, the top throwers included Dirks of Point Hope, Daisy Frankson of Point Lay, Marianne Rexford of Kaktovik, JayJay Aguvluk of Anaktuvuk Pass, Anthony Sarren of Wainwright, Eldred Aiken of Atqasuk, Kamaka Hepa of Barrow, and Darin Hopson of Nuiqsut.

Coming in second place were Roy Oviok of Point Hope, Kevin Lisbourne of Point Lay, Alec Gordon of Kaktovik, Jason Gordon of Anaktuvuk Pass, Billy Sielak of Wainwright, Keirston Bodfish of Atqasuk, Rebecca Gerke of Barrow, and Clayton Kaigelak of Nuiqsut.

Of the first-place scorers, Dirks was the lucky name to be drawn. Now, he and his mother just have to pack their bags and head to the airport.

"The two of them are coming to town and staying a week and attending the basketball games and getting some Christmas shopping done and just enjoying themselves."

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