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Subsistence life showcased on reality show

April 27th 2:22 pm | **By Jillian Rogers**

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PJ Simon laughed when asked about his age.

"Forty-two," he said. "I'm as old as the wind that blows."

Wise beyond his years perhaps, but certainly not all that old.

Simon, a Koyukon Athabascan who was born and raised in Allakaket, is the second tribal chief of the village and will showcase his wisdom next month on Animal Planet's latest yarn 'American River Renegades.'

Yes, it's true. Another reality show about Alaska.

But this one's a little different.

And Simon, who stars in the program alongside two fellow fishermen from Lower 48, saw the program as a platform to educate the masses on the triumphs and struggles of subsistence living in remote Interior Alaska.

"I wanted the chance to portray Alaska Native people in a positive light, instead of just the negative stories in the news," Simon said last week. "This is a good avenue to show Alaska and the rest of the U.S. on how one person out of 740,000 is living their life."

The series, which is set to premiere on May 29, "follows a breed of men who live outside the norm and call America's rivers and tributaries home. From the ice-cold Yukon River to the big muddy Mississippi to the great Pee Dee River in South Carolina down to the flooded deltas of Louisiana, these men live and die by some of the most inhospitable terrain in the country," according to Animal Planet and the Discovery Channel.

Simon was a little hesitant to sign on at first — he's been through the lure of reality TV before — but spending last summer fishing for salmon, sheefish, whitefish and grayling on various rivers in the Interior in front of a film crew was actually pretty fun, he said.

Mostly, because producers just let him do his thing.

"All I can say about it is that not much was scripted," Simon said. "You can't script much of a subsistence lifestyle.