

Friendly Eskimo logo captures airline's spirit

Today, the weatherbeaten face of an Eskimo smiling down from the tails of Alaska Airlines' planes is one of the most recognizable, endearing and longest-lasting corporate logos around. But the parka-hooded image started out as just a face in the crowd — and looked a bit different than he does today.

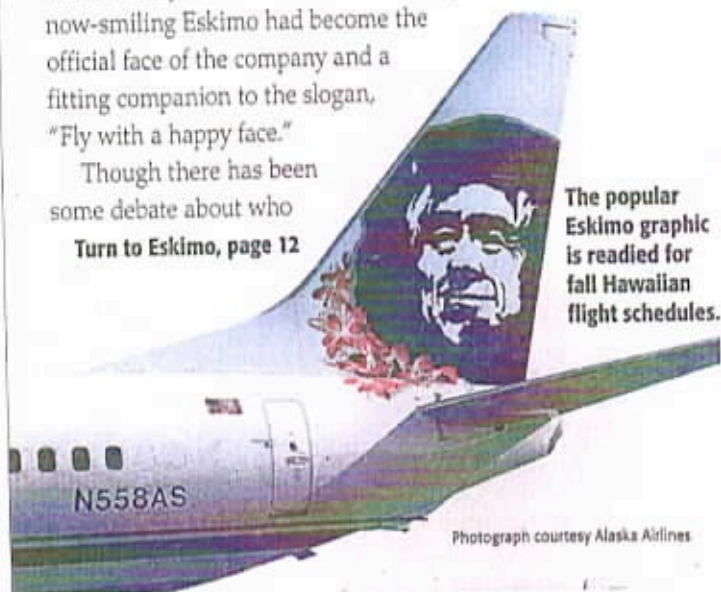
In the early 1970s, the airline was looking for a new corporate identity and four images were painted on the planes to recognize the vast resources, cultures and size of the state: the Eskimo, with a more serious expression than he wears today; a pick-wielding miner representing the gold rush of the 1880s and 1890s; a totem pole from southeast Alaska; and a pair of onion domes atop a Russian church (Russia controlled the territory from the 1780s to 1867, when it was purchased by the United States for 2 cents an acre).

While the other three images could easily have been linked in passengers' minds with other regions, the Eskimo was instantly identifiable as Alaskan. By the late 1970s, a now-smiling Eskimo had become the official face of the company and a fitting companion to the slogan, "Fly with a happy face."

Though there has been some debate about who

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The popular Eskimo graphic is readied for fall Hawaiian flight schedules.



Photograph courtesy Alaska Airlines

Replace Alaska's icon? No way

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originally created the winning corporate image and about whether the face was a picture of a particular person, the friendly visage has become a beloved one.

When a consultant recommended in the late 1980s that the image be replaced with a snow-capped mountain, a barrage of letters and phone calls lambasting the change

poured in, and the Alaska state legislature passed a resolution against it.

Since then, the Eskimo has enjoyed the perks of fame. When Alaska Airlines expanded its routes into Southern California, sunglasses adorned his face. And when the airline lands in Hawaii this fall, a brightly colored lei will hang around that familiar parka-clad neck.