

'Neighbors' shows diverse cultures of Alaska

By Bill Hess

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When Victoria Eubanks moved to Alaska from Los Angeles one year ago, she quickly realized that among her neighbors were people of many diverse cultures. Trouble was, she didn't hear enough about those cultures, so she decided to use her talents in broadcasting to do something about that.

"The whole state is so diverse," she explains from her home in Anchorage which doubles as a radio-production studio. "There are so many cultures here, but living in Anchorage, I was not getting a sense of it."

True, the major news media was busy covering the news, which she found informative, Eubanks says. What she wanted to do was get to the stories that perhaps were not quite so newsy, but which dealt with different people all across the state and what they were doing — things the big news and broadcast media often overlook. "I wanted to look



Victoria Eubanks talks with one of her "Neighbors."

at what makes Alaska Alaska," Eubanks explains.

She applied for and got a grant from SOHIO which would allow her to produce a five-minute radio show three times a week. It wouldn't give her a lot of money to work with, but enough to get out to different places in Alaska from time to time, interview different people, and then come back to Anchorage

and put together her shows.

Eubanks calls her show, which took to the air May 15, "Neighbors." While none of the major urban media have yet picked up "Neighbors," it has received a good reception in the rural areas where it has been broadcast. "The local stations are pleased with it," says Eubanks. "It's stories about the people who live there, and they like that."

It also gives people in places

like Unalaska a chance to turn on their radio and hear about what people, some of whom they may know, in other places like Nome are doing. So far, stations in Bethel, Kotzebue, Nome, North Pole, Dillingham and Kodiak are airing "Neighbors." Not coincidentally, these are the same communities to which Eubanks has so far traveled.

As she gets around to other places, and the word spreads about, "Neighbors," Eubanks hopes more stations will begin to use it. She offers it to them for free, but although five minutes does not seem like a very long time to Eubanks in which to tell a story, many stations, particularly in urban areas, shy away from giving a program that much air time.

Rural stations, particularly when their people can become involved, are more enthusiastic, says Eubanks. So far, Eubanks has run stories involving Eskimo Scouts, Aleut art, cross-cultural dance, housing and sewer projects sponsored by Kawarek Inc. in Nome, Native sports, Reggie Joule, interviews

with Elders, and several others.

She has prepared shows on 20 different Native languages in the state, and has covered Native medical students and working doctors.

Although Eubanks heard the horror stories that circulate through Anchorage about how hard Bush people can be to work with, she has found the opposite to be true.

"I have had the most wonderful reception!" says Eubanks. "Everyone is so warm. I find people in Alaska are so open, much more so than other places I have worked. When they realize that I'm there, and that I want to hear what they have to say in a fair way, they are so open."

Eubanks is staying away from political and controversial topics, focusing on showing "positive models for people."

"I love it! I've grown to love Alaska so much, and the people!" Eubanks recalls when she was in Nome, covering the reindeer fair. "So many people invited me into their homes, for dinner. They put their arms around me and gave me hugs. I felt completely accepted."