

Gerasimov praises Alaska-Soviet relations

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

Mikhail Gorbachev's chief spokesman, Gennadi Gerasimov, who was in Anchorage last week, said he was pleased to see that Alaskans and Soviets are meeting with each other more often.

Gerasimov spoke at the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce luncheon in connection with his visit to Alaska.

Gerasimov said it was satisfying for him to have contributed to opening the Ice Curtain.

"While many diplomats were traveling back and forth — between Moscow and Washington, D.C. — we were quietly opening the back door," he said.

"And now with the Cold War over, we meet each other more often."

Last month 49 of Alaska's business people visited several Soviet Far East

communities. Within the last year many Soviet groups have traveled to Alaska, and there have been numerous cultural exchanges and activities.

He encouraged business, medical as well as more cultural exchange between the two countries.

Even though Gerasimov is Gorbachev's chief spokesman, he said that he left his official titles in Washington D.C., and was speaking as a concerned citizen.

Some of Gerasimov's concerns were events that are taking place in the Soviet Union right now. He said some countries are saying that the Soviets don't want to be friends, but Gerasimov insisted that they have no enemies.

"We smile because we want to be friends with every country," Gerasimov said.

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He also talked about the Soviet Union's struggle for a more democratic society, with *perestroika*, re-structuring the state and its economy, and *glasnost*, openness.

Although these two ideas are great ones, Gerasimov said people are still trying to iron out all the wrinkles.

"*Perestroika* was long overdue," he said.

Gerasimov, a former journalist who has worked at the Novosti Press Agency, said during the beginning of the Soviet Union's efforts toward democracy, the media started printing

stories about corrupt government entities. He believes this type of exposure gave the people courage.

Even with openness, however, he admitted that there will be those who won't change, "simply because they don't want to."

Gerasimov said next in line is to make laws to give legal basis for economic reform in the Soviet Union.

The Soviets are also discussing the possibility of opening a Soviet consulate in Anchorage, as well as increasing efforts to work jointly with Alaskans during search and rescue missions.