

Important Year

By LOIS KEATING

INUUVIK, N.W.T.—Feb. 5—Despite all my good intentions for the new year, here it is well into February before I'm sending you my first column for 1975.

This will probably be one of the most important years ever for the native people of the Canadian north. Beginning on March 3, the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry will officially begin, and the hearings are expected to continue probably for the rest of the year, and possibly even into 1976. Judge Berger has said he will take all the time that is necessary to get the information which the Inquiry needs.

C.O.P.E. (The Committee for Original Peoples Entitlement), the Indian Brotherhood and the Metis Association all have been sending Pipeline Information Fieldworkers into the settlements to visit each home and speak to the people in their own language, to ensure that everyone knows as much as possible about what is going on.

All during the hearings, CBC (the Canadian Broadcasting Company) will broadcast current information about the hearings—in seven languages. Needless to say, this is a monumental undertaking and requires a great deal of work, both by CBC staff and by the native translators.

Information sessions have also been given in this area by the Beaufort Sea Environmental Program. These people have been doing studies on all sorts of subjects pertaining to drilling in the Beaufort Sea, and its possible effects on the people and the environment.

Last week they came back to Inuvik and the settlements with the results of their work so far, and they also showed an interesting new film called "Understanding the Beaufort Sea." Eighteen oil companies are actively supporting the research program, and the remaining funds are being provided by Environment Canada, a branch of the federal Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

The Federation of Native North of Sixty met in Inuvik in January and the main topics were the pipeline and land claims. All of the native organizations in the N.W.T. have Land Claims Negotiating Teams which will be meeting with government officials in an attempt to come to a satisfactory agreement.

In December, the Delta lost three of its old-time citizens—Rachel Selamio and Elizabeth Koe of Aklavik, and Alfred Charlie of Fort McPherson.

Nellie Cournoyea has taken a year's leave of absence as manager of CBC radio in Inuvik, so she can work with the Inuit people on land claims. She will be working with ITC (Inuit Tapirisat of Canada) and C.O.P.E.—she'll still be living in Inuvik, but will be spending a lot of time in the communities, talking with the people about their future, and about the problems they will be facing as a result of the development that will be going on in the north. Bob Rhodes, who has been with CBC in Toronto, is the new manager of CHAK.

The Territorial Council elections will be held March 10. The number of councillors has been increased to 15, and this will be the first fully elected council that the N.W.T. has had.

The snow is a lot deeper this year than usual. A lot of the trappers have been having trouble with their skidoos in the deep snow, and for a while after the rivers froze over, there was also a lot of overflow, which added to their difficulties.

We had a very cold spell around the end of the year, with temperatures in Inuvik going down to -66 degrees below F.—and in some of the settlements the wind chill factor was lower than -120 degrees below.

The ice roads are now open to Tuktoyaktuk and Aklavik, and for about two weeks now, people have been traveling back and forth. Also, it is now possible to drive from Inuvik to Arctic Red River and to Fort McPherson. It seems good to be able to get in the car and have a choice of directions in which to go.