

# Education Consortium—

## *Audio-Visual Communication Viewed*

Heralding the space-age technology of America in this same month in which men chatted

back and forth from the moon to the control center, it is somewhat of a paradox that vast areas of America do not have any permanent, practical, reliable means of audio-visual communication.

An effort to bend this technology to serve the need in rural Alaska was discussed at an Educational Telecommunication Consortium held in Fairbanks, Friday April 28, on the University of Alaska campus.

A distinguished panel under the chairmanship of Harry Carter, AFN, delved into the successes, projections, and aspirations of an educational project that has beamed experimental programs into interior rural villages, using the ATS-F NASA satellite.

The group heard reports on future programming from Sue Pittman, project director; on hearing loss testing by John Devens; on the Library Association programming by Mary Matthews; on the Community Health Aide Program by Phil Moreno; and on the biomedical segment usage by Glen Stanley.

After a promising year, the project now faces extinction for lack of funds. The Consortium explored how they might extend it, discussing at length the technical problems and the audience

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response to the existing programming.

Mary Matthews said, "There is a whole level of educational resources we're not using on the satellite program. And the regrettable thing is, that the people not being used are not made aware of the program."

She told of two bush legislators who were exposed to the program in Juneau. "They were fascinated by what could be done," she said, "and their support and enthusiasm were marvelous."

Bob Arnold, executive director of the Alaska Educational Broadcasting Commission, introduced Dr. Jim Potter and Dr. Jim Peterson from the Federation of Rocky Mountain States who are conducting a similar program in telecommunication using the ATS-F satellite in New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana.

Jim Peterson, in charge of the early childhood portion of Rocky Mountain's project, felt that the Alaska group and his own could share mutual resources available to both organizations, as their interests overlapped in several areas.

"If you're going to head off a lot of educational problems," said Dr. Peterson, "you need to begin in the early phases."

The Rocky Mountain project is directed at remote, rural areas inaccessible by existing broadcasting facilities, and this area is populated primarily by reservation Indians, Spanish-speaking peoples, migrant workers, and rural-isolated groups.

They, like the Alaska project said Peterson, want the "nitty-gritty input of the people who are going to be the ultimate users of the system."

He pointed out that although there is some excellent programming available for early childhood, it has some culture relevancy problems. "Sesame Street", aimed primarily at urban ghetto kids, may not have the same relevancy for Arctic Slope Eskimo children or Navaho reservation children.

Bilingual programs and culture relevancy need to be explored. "But whatever you do for kids," said Peterson, "it doesn't matter whether you have good, culturally relevant shows unless you get on top of two variables: parents and teachers."

"You have to get parents involved in developing and in looking at health and education

needs."

In looking at long-range educational needs, Peterson condemned the fire-hose approach. "We can't continue to spend dollars to fight fires when we could spend dollars to prevent those fires."

Forty per cent of the Indians in the nation live in the eight Rocky Mountain states.

"They are very condescending," said Dr. Potter, "about white-eyes ideas. Therefore we need feed-back from them."

He related a conversation he had with an Apache leader whose people had been extensively studied by anthropologists. The Apache said:

"We would like 20 anthropologists to come live with us so that we could study them." Curious people, anthropologists.

The Alaska Telecommunications Consortium was in full accord with local involvement. Sam Kito, executive director for the Tanana Chiefs, and Georgianna Lincoln, also of the Tanana Chiefs, spoke to the panel on precisely this issue.

Mr. Kito reminded the group that he had appeared before them at their last meeting to urge "participation on the board at the grass roots level."

He asked that programs developed and utilized in the satellite program come to the office of the Tanana Chiefs for final approval, with the option to delete.

"If you're going to use the village people as guinea pigs, it's up to the leadership to control that action."

He pointed out that ten of the most active sites in the program were located in the Tanana Chiefs region, and he requested that there be a change of direction in putting people on the board of the Consortium from the villages.

Immediately following Mr. Kito's speech, a motion was made to add to the agenda a reconstituting of the board along the lines recommended.

This was accomplished toward the end of the meeting to include the addition of the executive directors of each Native Association in which the program operates.

Sue Pittman, Project Director, introduced Georgianna Lincoln who has been broadcasting in connection with the Tanana Service Unit Board of Health.

Mrs. Lincoln, representing what she called the consumer

aspect, told of her experience on the program.

"Most of the people we are reaching are Native population. I can see a brand new outlook on the satellite project. I wonder if we should hit the family unit. We're now hitting the child and the village health aide. What about the parents?"

"I've been listening to what the people want to hear. Wanted: a program on VD, on impetigo, on the employment aspect, what to expect if they come into an urban area, what are housing costs, a program revolving around Boarding Home students who need to say, Hi, Mom and Dad, and hear their parents' voices, similar to hospital calls, preventive medical care, cultural heritage, Patsy Wiley is doing a great job there, community programs not aimed at one segment like the health aide."

"In the interior of Alaska," said Mrs. Lincoln, "communication was and still is a sporadic thing. There are 12 villages on Satellite communication. What happens to the other 26? Communication is a top priority in interior Alaska."

Glen Stanley responded with a strong point about the limitations of the system as it is now operated.

"I must emphasize," he said, "the experimental nature of the satellite program. You cannot make a service out of it. Putting more stations in the Tanana district might do more harm than good. We are rapidly learning what a difference a satellite can make. Its usefulness at this stage is for getting information for the potential of a communication system for the whole state."

A member of the Consortium observed that there has not been the commitment in Juneau to the program.

"The State," he said, "has the capability to make a commitment, to say: We are resolved to solve the problem of communication in rural Alaska. The federal government is not going to continue to meet the needs of Alaska. Alaska must begin to meet her own needs."

Jim Peterson expressed the opinion that satellite communication could be developed with the sole function of meeting community needs.

"In military development," he said, "cost is not a criteria, as opposed to privacy, preven-

tion of jamming, and other military considerations. To develop a program aimed primarily at community use, other variables would have to be considered."

"The Rocky Mountains would like three times the coverage we have now. However, we're getting the most costly item, the satellite, free, courtesy of NASA. Were we paying for the satellite, we would like slightly more performance. I think the skepticism about a low-cost design is more political than practical."

Until satellite communication is developed solely for the purposes of projects such as the Alaska project and the Rocky Mountain projects, the civilian programs will suffer from trying to fit their needs around military needs.

The FTS-G, the next scheduled satellite to be launched by NASA, has a planned orbit that is not favorable to Alaska reception. Requests to alter the orbit must be considered along with all other nationwide projects, many on the east coast, and understandably, NASA's purpose preempts all others.

The people who are in need of satellite communication service will have to become politically vocal.

Patsy Wiley, now producing the Village Circle Story Exchange and a series called "What Do You Want To Know?", had a question of her own.

"It puzzles me exactly what this Consortium is. We have just begun communication with people on things that matter, life and death, VISTA, personal programs on alcoholism, drug abuse, fire control, how to save your home, what to do when you come into Fairbanks, library in orbit, recipes on nutrition, cassettes of stories ... All of this is just going to fall to dust."

"We've been doing it with good cheer in the face of terrible technical difficulties. It is going to stop July 1. What is going to happen? Where are the funds?"

The project has many bugs to work out: full power maintenance, reception stabilization, audience involvement, programming goals, locations of receivers and transmitters and funds.

It is as Glen Stanley pointed out, very much an experiment, but one whose final results will extend many years into the future life of rural Alaska.