

Walrus Carnival at Savoonga

On Sunday, May 2, the 800 residents of St. Lawrence Island and visitors from throughout Alaska will gather to dedicate the huge "walrus freezer" completed at the Eskimo village of Savoonga as part of their annual Savoonga Walrus Carnival.

The installation, under development for four years by the University of Alaska Institute of Arctic Environmental Engineering, is a circular wooden tank 55 feet in diameter and 12 feet deep, with a capacity of 200,000 pounds of meat.

It is designed to conserve resources and bolster the village's subsistence economy by preserving the walrus meat, a dietary staple, from spoiling during the summer months. The pilot project was financed principally by the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce - which provided \$150,000 for development and construction of a prototype model.

Eventually similar "ice boxes" may be installed elsewhere in the Arctic and Bering Sea walrus hunting region and even in in-

terior villages where warm summer temperatures pose a serious meat spoilage problem.

The dedication ceremony, timed to coincide with the start of the Spring walrus hunt, will be part of the annual Savoonga Walrus Carnival. Many visitors have been invited and transportation has been arranged from Nome at noon on Saturday, the 1st day of the Carnival.

Visitors should bring sleeping bags, warm clothes and make their own reservations to Nome. Sharon Nelson of the IAEE (479-7330) will make reservations till April 30, after which she leaves for Nome to coordinate flights.

The walrus freezer, which cost about \$150,000 has been a cooperative effort between EDA, the University of Alaska, IAEE and the village of Savoonga, with assistance from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the University's Sea Grant program.

In 1966 Gladys Musgrove, now a retired home economist of the University's Cooperative Extension Service, asked University personnel if they could help solve the walrus meat spoilage

problem.

In some years, half the spring harvest of 185 to 400 walrus was inedible - or had to be eaten in a putrid state - after summer storage in makeshift holes in the ground covered with sheds.

The walruses, which stay near the end of the solid ice pack, migrate northward past St. Lawrence Island in May and June on their way to the Arctic Ocean. This is the best hunting season - better than their southern migration in November and December cold.

Two years of research on the UA campus followed their EDA grant, and the Savoonga freezer was built in Seattle and shipped to the island last fall. Then followed excavation problems in the difficult frozen silty clay volcanic ash which had to be dug-out by pick and shovel.

Almost continuous storms raged in the late fall and communication and transportation for outside consultants was poor. However, the freezer was completed in time for the spring hunt.