

TribalNet links Keepers of the Treasures, others

by Don Kashevaroff

It has been suggested that the information superhighway (or Internet) will cause cultures to die faster than ever as people need to have a common language and knowledge base to communicate. Creative Native minds have discovered a way to turn this around, and use this new technology to pull tribes together to share and preserve their culture.

This summer, a new company started up with a mission of preserving tribes and cultures by facilitating the exchange of information. TribalNet International Inc. is an Alaska Native-owned company that offers e-mail services combined with a repository for Native information. TribalNet accomplishes these tasks by having members access one of their two statewide servers via computers. Once a member is logged on, they can send and receive electronic mail, or browse through information conferences. There currently are running conferences on the Indian Health Service, Bureau

of Indian Affairs and such breaking topics as Title III compacting. TribalNet intends to set up a dedicated conference for Keepers of the Treasures this fall.

TribalNet's goal is to have a user-friendly system which all tribes in the state can ac-

cess in order to keep up on Native issues, and the programs currently shaping the age in which we live. One of the most useful features is the ability to share information with other tribes in the state. This allows tribes to better understand each other and learn new ways of operating the various tribal programs. By allowing tribes to cross the ANCSA regional barriers our state becomes more unified in the mission to better all Native lives.

The idea for TribalNet came out of the statewide IHS negotiations on the Alaska

Tribal Health Compact (ATHC). Covering more than 85 percent of the tribes in the state, the ATHC posed a logistical challenge for distributing information to affected tribes. One solution was to have the Alaska Native Health Board fax out all pertinent

information. However, that option did not enable the tribes to communicate with each other quickly and inexpensively. By using TribalNet, members can "chat" with each other in real-time conversations, as well as send files over hundreds of miles in seconds. Use of TribalNet is far more time and cost-effective than traditional alternatives.

One of TribalNet's goals is to keep a software library of the issues and decisions that have affected the ATHC. In the same way, TribalNet has started to track BIA issues that tribes need to know about. As

TribalNet's membership grows, other conferences are being added to help tribes. Members with a particular interest can even start their own special conference to share information that is of interest to them, such as the repatriation efforts of Keepers of the Treasures.

Finally, TribalNet has striven to make access as easy as possible. All you need is a Windows or Macintosh computer with a modem to use their free graphical software. Those users who own DOS computers can access from any terminal emulation program. TribalNet currently has a local access number in Anchorage and one in Glennallen, with plans to expand local access to more than 40 communities in Alaska in the near future.

TribalNet charges only \$10 per month and has a \$25 setup fee for global Internet e-mail access. You can receive more information and get your free access software by calling (907) 258-6410.

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New Computer Service