

Education

Bering Strait business project for youth

Youth in eight Bering Strait villages face an exciting year of regional economic development, thanks to a \$350,000 two-year grant from the Administration for Native Americans.

Dazee, executive director of the Bering Strait Economic Council and project director for the new grant, said the money will go toward starting youth-run businesses.

"They're going to be working in an entrepreneurial environment in a real-time setting," she said. "This is not: Let's have a bake sale."

Dazee, who uses only one name, said the grant stems in part from the Salmon Berry Shop, a Nome Native youth entrepreneurial project. Concerned about the extremely high incidence of alcohol and other drug use by youth of Nome, Doug McCoy, executive director of the Nome Community Center, wrote a grant addressing the high rate of suicide and alcohol-related deaths of young people. The board of the Nome Community Center started plans for the training project in 1988.

The shop opened in Nome in 1990 as a training center craft shop. Youth get training in operating a small crafts store featuring Native Alaskan items made by Nome residents, including the youth themselves. Skills in management, ac-

counting, sales and public relations are taught and practiced. The young people are expected to assume responsibility for the operation of the business under the direction of a project director. They participate in all management decisions, and senior youth staff are responsible for training newcomers to the program.

The expanded enterprise now includes the Eugene Omiak Sourdough Factory which produces dried sourdough for sale throughout the state and internationally. The factory got statewide attention last spring when it received the Governor's Exporter of the Year award for manufacturing. The award is a competitive honor, and the factory was selected from among major Alaskan businesses.

Dazee said the ANA grant, which started last month, will help finance eight school-based village businesses. Each village will receive \$4,000 to help cover business start-up costs.

Projects will be selected to fill needs in villages that currently are not being met. Dazee said there will be no duplication of services and the intent is not to compete with an already existing business.

Three projects have already been planned, including:

- **Nome** - Continuation of the Salmon Berry Shop and the Eugene Omiak Sourdough Factory.

- **Shishmaref** - Startup of a 1,000 watt youth radio-station. Also envisioned is videotaped production of cultural activities that people in the region would like to share with the outside world.

- **Teller** - If plans work out, Teller will be getting a new restaurant. A vital training component for youth from both Teller and Brevig Mission will be key to the operation.

Dazee said projects for five of the villages in the region have yet to be determined, but possibilities under consideration are a net hanging/repair business and a silk screening center. She said she will be traveling to villages to meet with tribal councils to get suggestions on projects.

Besides the \$4,000 for each community, Dazee said the project will employ eight part-time trainers. Village trainers will recruit youth, provide training and supervision, encourage and support the efforts of the young people and insure that the village project is operated according to project goals and procedures.

Another component of the grant is that funding is included for some of the youth to travel to Washington, D.C. with

the trainers.

The basic concept of the training project is that people learn best by "doing", recognizing that youth need work experiences in a supportive learning environment. The goal is not to make every young person an independent entrepreneur. Rather, equipping young people with the skills to develop and express their business skills and to gain the confidence and capacity to enter the workplace of their choice is the central aim.

Sixteen young people have successfully participated in the Nome program over the past 18 months. Of these, eight graduated from high school during their participation, with one completing his GED. Six youth moved into managerial positions in their business and two became trainers for a Job Training Partnership Act project. Two have begun their own small business, and several moved from the area to pursue career goals through specific vocational training programs.

People who want more information on the project as it develops can contact Dazee at the Bering Strait Economic Council in Nome, 443-5304. ■