

New community foundation to assist ARDORs

In early 1991, the Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDORs) recognized the need for a coordinated effort to raise funds for community revitalization and grassroots economic development projects throughout the state. A task force was appointed to investigate the possibilities and make recommendations on how to achieve this goal.

In November 1991, after much research and discussion, and upon recognition of a potential role for organized philanthropy in response to Alaska's rural economic crisis, the task force recommended formation of an Alaska community foundation. The task force believes that a community foundation could play a leadership role in securing funding for economic and community development throughout Alaska.

On January 2, 1992, Alaska's first statewide community foundation was formed. The Alaska Enterprise Foundation (AEF) was established for the purpose of soliciting funds from private foundations, corporations and major individual donors to support operation of the ARDORs. Funds raised will be used for special economic development projects and other community development projects in Alaska. According to its president, Juanita Helms, the Alaska Enterprise Foundation has several major funding requests pend-

ing with private community development foundations nationwide. "But in order for those foundations to take our commitment seriously," Helms says, "we need to raise about \$75,000 from within the state."

According to Helms, the formation of the ARDORs clearly shows the desire and willingness of rural Alaskans to assume greater responsibility for determining their economic futures.

The AEF will not be accepting grant requests for projects for at least another six months. When grant funding becomes available the focus will be on encouraging economic diversification. Enhancing and conserving human and natural resources, and revitalizing local infrastructure will also be high on the list.

"We're hoping the foundation can support the creation of profitable businesses and direct assistance to specific geographic areas, females, minorities and the unemployed," said Helms.

Helms also said the foundation can work with rural communities to share educational, health care and planning resources. Its organizers hope to help build systems for the cooperative delivery of vital services. Also, they will encourage exploration of alternatives to traditional infrastructure development. ■