

She Said 'YES' And You Didn't Hear

A week-long Hearing Workshop was held in Fairbanks last week in spite of -50 degree weather. Although several villages were unable to make it in because of the severe weather, a plane load arrived from Barrow and Wainwright one day late, after they were forced to overnight in Anchorage.

The new program is a step forward over the days when villagers were tested in the

villages and mailed a hearing aid at some later date without having anyone check the apparatus, how it fit, and give pointers on its use.

Under the joint sponsorship of the State's Vocational Rehabilitation and the Satellite Project, villagers are now being brought to Fairbanks, custom-fitted with an aid that will best suit their needs, and given in-

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struction on care and maintenance, on lip-reading, and on all aspects of how they can increase hearing ability.

Audiology supervisor John Devens said the success ratio is much increased when this method is used over the old "hearing-aid-in-the-mail" method. He related a typical example of a patient who had been air-mailed a hearing aid in a padded brown package.

Through a clerical fluke, the package contained an earmold only and no other parts. The confused patient began to wear the mold, thinking it was a complete hearing aid.

Strangely enough, other people seeing the ear piece began to speak more loudly and for a time, the patient thought his hearing HAD actually improved. In time, a kind friend took a closer look and discovered the problem.

This time, coming to the Workshop, there would be no

mistakes. Not only would he be fitted with the right (and complete) hearing aid for his needs, he would receive hours of instruction and counseling on its use.

Although Alaska's villagers suffer from a far greater ratio of hearing loss than a comparable number of lower-48'ers, the use of hearing aids has never been widely accepted in the past.

Devens is conducting an intensive education campaign to correct this long neglected area through the Communications, Satellite Project. Of all the multiple uses to which satellite radio has been put in Alaska, perhaps none are more innovative than Devens.

A group of villagers treated at the Workshop last June will communicate with Devens this week on how the hearing aids are working for them and what problems, if any, they are having. In communities scattered over

northern Alaska, they will ask questions which Devens can answer on the spot through two-way communication.

The staff at the Workshop are hopeful that not only will hearing aids help those people brought in but that, returning to the villages, the people helped will act as "public relations", encouraging others with hearing problems to try the program.

Several factors contribute to the high loss of hearing statistics in Alaska. Foremost is a high incidence of otitis media, chronic ear infections in young children.

Every village mother is urged to seek medical help at any sign of ear problems within the family. Prompt medical attention can prevent heartbreaking loss of hearing in the future.

While a certain loss of hearing is normal in most elderly people, in Alaska the loss is more severe. And because the elderly are not eligible for vocational rehabilitation, funds for hearing aids for older persons are difficult to come by under the present programs.

The Workshop has solved

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some of the problem with a "loaner bank" — a stockpile of second-hand, used, and discarded hearing aids that can be drawn on for use by the elderly. It is far from an ideal solution, however, as older people often need even more careful fitting and adjustments than the young.

The active life-style of Alaskans also contributes to hearing loss. High frequency noises can cause loss — chain saws, snow-machines, shotguns and rifles. Devens is working on a campaign to encourage men in the villages to wear noise protectors when engaging in this type of activity.

Making ear-protectors the "in" thing to wear is a big task. Too often, men don't think it is manly to "baby" themselves, but ask a man who has already suffered a hearing loss and he would probably gladly go back and put on a protector rather than a hearing aid.

Devens says he carries one poster around with him showing a very sexy girl with the caption: "Suppose she said YES and you didn't hear her?"

Good hearing opens up many worlds. Edwin Simon of Huslia, born in 1898, has recently embarked on a new career of teaching the Athabascan language to village children. For Edwin Simon there was no question about the importance of sound and good hearing.

Returning to Huslia after a week in Fairbanks, Simon who has many tales to tell, songs to teach, and legends to recite, will hear every word the children of Huslia learn to say in this oldest of languages.