

Leadership models needed

One of the problems we face in Alaska when it comes to bootleggers and those who oppose them is one of grave personal conflict - they are our relatives, our neighbors. How do we address this problem?

I visited a community in northern Alaska last August and watched the entire community change when the bootleggers hit town. The mayor told me that he hates it when they come to town. I said, "Do something about it. Call the Public Safety Officers. Arrest the perpetrators!"

"I can't," he said. "They're my relatives. It would cause bad blood."

One of the most wonderful traits that Alaska Natives, in general, have is their acceptance of people. It's very noticeable when a new-comer comes to town, a party is thrown - traditional dancing, Native foods are cooked, and the hospitality is unbelievable. Governor Knowles has experienced this during his whirlwind tours of his rural inaugural balls.

One thing I really pride myself on is my Native culture. Even though I was raised in Alaska's largest city, I learned enough from my parents to acknowledge who I am. It also helped that my first 'real' job was working for the *Tundra Times*. Through my employment here, I learned a lot from the many different cultures prevalent among Alaska's indigenous peoples.

Alaska Natives are non-aggressive, brilliant, creative, flexible tough and adaptive.

Their adaptive nature has led to the acceptance of western civilization and all that it brings, including much that we appreciate. It brought religion, education, and housing. But it also brought alcohol and drugs which had a domino effect and brought physical abuse, violent crimes, and a diminished self-esteem.

Back to the original question: What do we do about our grave personal conflict - making our friends and relatives realize that they break the law when they import and sell liquor to those communities that voted not to have liquor available?

Everybody has to sacrifice something, even if it is a special friendship or a close relative. Those friends and relatives that break the law, also break homes or cause severe emotional and/or physical damage when they bring liquor or drugs into our communities and homes. They need to realize the negative impact they have on you and your family. Tell them so in your own way, nice, quiet and firm, so they understand without being offended.

They have to answer to someone, even if it is a relative or friend. Maybe if they knew they had to answer to a respectable community leader who holds his or her ground, they won't take a chance on breaking the law. It's tough, but our bloodlines make us strong enough to handle it.

We heard many positive comments during the preparation of this sobriety journal about our stance on alcohol.

"It wasn't enough that the *Tundra Times* stopped accepting liquor ads, but also paid a very heavy price for that policy - a major loss of revenue."

"It's good to see that we're not just saying, 'don't drink!' but that we're saying, 'here is something else to do instead.'"

Perry Eaton, president of Alaska Village Initiatives, has signed up to support *Singing the Sober Song*, but wanted to have his ad relate to a sober leadership. "Leaders need to make the initiative," he said.

Leaders like (Ret.) General John Schaeffer who shocked just about everyone at an AFN Convention several years ago when he announced his sobriety - publicly, in front of thousands of people. We commend his forthrightness and backbone to stand up for sobriety.

We do need more positive role models. We need to let people know that it is okay to do things sober. Besides, it's more fun.

We think that the leaders of rural communities: the mayors, IRA and tribal presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, corporation executives, business owners, business operators, school teachers, janitors, typists, teenagers, everybody, all need to show everyone else that they can do anything, lead a community, and be anything sober.