

Tundra Times bids farewell to executive editor

by Fern Greenbank

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Tundra Times Executive Editor Anna Pickett vacated her post last week and headed off to a new life in Fairbanks after a nine-year relationship with the newspaper. She's careful to point out that she's not ending the relationship, just redefining it.

The task of continuing Pickett's commitment has been passed on to Mike Hinman, 31, a senior in the University of Alaska

Anchorage's Journalism Department.

Pickett, who began her career with the *Tundra Times* in 1979 at the age of 17, decided it was time to focus her efforts.

"The battleground just became too big," said Pickett. "There are so many issues affecting Natives, and I want to work on tribal rights."

Pickett is considering several job offers in the Interior which focus on tribal management and lobbying for Native rights.

Employed first as a typesetter for \$3.50 an hour, Pickett worked her way up by

performing every job from typist to production assistant to secretary, bookkeeper, circulation manager and advertising representative.

Although she came and went many times from 1979 to 1992, she said her heart was always in the *Tundra Times* operation. In 1991, the *Tundra Times* closed its doors, which Pickett said was "devastating." In California at the time, Pickett knew the doors were not shut for good.

In 1992, when the board of directors

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decided to resurrect the newspaper, Pickett entered the scene again, this time working a full-time day job while trying to keep the paper afloat by night.

"Anna's contribution to the paper has been significant," said board member Pat Petrivelli. "She kept us operating and rose to meet the demands."

"It will be hard to let go. That's why I'm diving into a lot of different things right away to distract me."

~ Anna M. Pickett
departing *Tundra Times* Editor

Under the tutelage of former *Tundra Times* editor Jeff Richardson, Pickett "grew with the paper," said Petrivelli.

For the past year and a half, Pickett served as executive editor, fulfilling a dream she had held since her typesetting days. Her dream now is to effect change using a different approach.

"My interest has always been in the way Western civilization impacted Native people," said Pickett. "Natives are not submissive. They're passive. And passive people get stepped on."

Pickett said her greatest regret is that she was always too overwhelmed by the 100-hour work weeks to cover all the issues in depth. She admits it was frightening sometimes to be the voice representing a people in an office by herself, knowing someone was going to be angry with the stand she took.

Part Athabaskan and part Inupiat, with family originating in Nome, Unalakleet, Tanana and Stevens Village, Pickett said she felt a responsibility to "fight everyone's battles."

"I wasn't born into my culture," said Pickett.

"I was born out of it. I learned about my culture from my work, so my work was my life."

Born and raised in Anchorage, Pickett said it's time for her to experience Native life from a different perspective.

"I understand it in here," said Pickett, pointing to her head, "but I want to feel it in here," she said, placing her hands over her heart.

Pickett said she hopes to work with Native youth in her spare time, sharing her commitment to "Native voices." She'd even like to write a book someday about

the effect the *Tundra Times* and founder Howard Rock has had on Alaska Natives.

"The paper needs to get back to the level it was at when Howard Rock was alive," said Pickett.

Having held the paper together long enough to pass it on to a new staff, Pickett feels ambivalent about leaving. She has all the outward signs of job burnout — puffy eyes, a tired voice, a shuffling walk — but she also has an emerging energy just below the surface.

"It will be hard to let go," said Pickett. "That's why I'm diving into a lot of different things right away to distract me."

Board chairwoman Toni Kahlken-Jones said Pickett's departure gave the board cause to reevaluate its operation.

"It's a difficult separation for us," said Kahlken-Jones. "Because Anna's skills

were so broad, from soup to nuts, we really did come to rely on her. The chances of ever finding one person like her again is slim, so we'll be looking at ways to restructure our way of doing business."

Kahlken-Jones, like Pickett, said the newspaper always looks to the past to sustain it.

"We look at Howard Rock's dedication and vision and accomplishments," said Kahlken-Jones. "He wasn't a journalist by education or trade, but he did something about issues of grave concern to Alaska Natives."

Like Rock, Pickett wants to make a difference, although she's not sure how she can be most effective.

"The *Tundra Times* has been my life for so long," said Pickett, "I'll probably be calling in every day while I'm on vacation."