

ANWSO Convention held, new officers elected

By Linda Lord-Jenkins

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More than 300 hardworking women from throughout the state gathered in Anchorage two weeks ago to discuss issues and problems of concern to all and to share their views on many topics.

The members of the Alaska Native Women's Statewide Organization met to discuss matters such as government accountability, leadership, alcoholism and drug abuse, the history of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and how to become involved in the political process.

At the convention, Lillian McGarvey, an Aleut Corp. board member and the Aleut Region representative to ANSWO, was elected president of the organization for the



Lillian McGarvey

coming year. She replaces Brenda Itta of Barrow.

New vice-president is a new board member - Vernita Zyles of the Bering Straits Region. Sharon Sunnyboy is the new secretary, replacing Agnes Griffith of Doyon who has

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Corporate relations, political process discussed

left the board.

During their three days of meetings the women held workshops on accountability, leadership and other matters. They also heard from Democratic Gubernatorial Candidate Bill Sheffield and his running mate Steve McAlpine, and heard a discussion on subsistence.

That panel, made up of elders Pauline Harvey of Kotzebue, Bertha Moses, anthropologist Rosita Worl of Anchorage, Natasia Markham of Bethel, and John Shively of the Alaskans for Sensible Fish and Game Management, all urged the women to register to vote, to vote, and to encourage their friends and family members to vote.

Pauline Harvey spoke of her early days in which her mother trained her to pick berries, and to work in the subsistence ways.

"My mother used to tell me a girl has to learn to work with her mother early so she knows to be a mother and to store food away.

"We can't run away from subsistence" said Mrs. Harvey. It has to be with us. We have got to know to gather and to store..."

Bertha Moses from the Doyon Region spoke of the quality of the foods eaten by subsistence people and the quality of the products produced with the traditional ways.

"I've never seen factory made mukluks that are warm like Native-made. We can't afford to buy factory tanned moose. The factory tanned aren't as warm as ours. They wear out faster and get stiff when it gets cold.

Shively spoke of the importance of having a great number of rural residents register to vote.

"It is critical to have complete registration of voters," said Shively.

He said that much of the money raised by Sensible will be spent educating people in the urban areas of Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks and Ketchikan of the need for the subsistence law."

He also said that rural residents have to vote at a much higher percentage than urban residents because urban areas have more voters than rural areas and can outvote them.

And he pounded home the message that will be sent out before November, "If you are for subsistence in November you have to vote against Initiative 7."

Shively said that Democrat Bill Sheffield is the only candidate who favors the subsistence law as it is while Tom Fink and Dick Randolph oppose it.

Worl questioned the equity of the sacrifices that rural people are asked to make. "We are told with the development of mineral resource that they



Women from the Calista sing a song urging people to keep the current subsistence law.

have to be developed in the "national interest" even though it may hurt our subsistence lifestyle... yet when it came to fish and game resources — the basis of our lives, we are also told we must be equal, that we must share equally with those in the urban community."

And she asked "why is the rural Alaska getting a disproportionate amount of state revenues yet we don't talk about the fact that most money for the state comes from rural development."

During a workshop on getting involved in the political process, a discussion was held on how to get involved with regional corporation matters.

One woman, the wife of a regional corporation director, said she got drawn into the political process by others because of her husband's board decisions.

"I would have people coming up to me to discuss matters and I would try to explain if I could. It has gotten so I drill him when he comes home from a board meeting to make sure he's certain of his positions so I can explain them."

Some women were somewhat reluctant to question board members who were unwilling to release information about board actions.

But they were told "you have the right to know something that involves your board. But remember, you're not there to make trouble. You're there to learn."

Women are strong. All we need to know is that we have talent for all the things we've done. We need to develop confidence and speak up. The knowledge of the mechanics of corporate matters will come.

They were told to get involved on committees and ask questions at board meetings when they have problems.

In the government accountability workshop, Gordon Jackson, a former legislative aide led a discussion on making government responsive.

But one of the most instructive discussions in one session came from Vernita Zyles of Unalakleet.

She told the group of how the people there forced a Department of Transportation representative to change plans that DOT had made for village expansion.

"He came to our village for a hearing and asked a question. His question was not "do you" want growth but "how much do you want" to expand. Someone finally stood up and said, "wait a minute — do we want this?"

She said the man was told to return after villagers had a chance to discuss the matter.

"You have to realize that government is not perfect. If you can make sure, know in your head to question you can make sure important decisions are not made for you without your knowledge."

The group was warned to be aware of what government financial aid can mean to how things are done in villages.

"There is no free lunch. Sure you get the money but you have to do things in compliance with laws that sometimes are in variance with our cultures."

Natasia Markham of Bethel stressed the importance of learning to fight with words. "We're slowly being devoured through the use of words against us."

Another person said that "We need agents to articulate for us to educate people."

During the leadership workshop, John Shively asked the women if they thought they were leaders. Few said they were.

Leaders always sacrifice something, said Shively. "They always sacrifice time with their family," and often suffer great criticism from people inside the culture when most of their dealings are with people outside the culture.

One elderly woman said that to be a good leader "a person has to learn to get respect of all the people. She must acknowledge mistakes gratefully."

Shively said that leaders must have a purpose — must know where they are going; must use a teamwork approach and must be willing to serve and sacrifice.