

Yes, Diane, there are banks in Nome

By Dan Bloom

for the Tundra Times

I recently received a letter from a woman in Colorado who was ordering a little item I sell through my mail-order business and instead of sending me a check or a money order for \$2.37 as my advertisement had indicated she sent me two one dollar bills and thirty-seven cents worth of change, all taped to her letter. She wrote:

"Here's the cash. I wasn't sure if you could cash a check up there..."

Well, yes, Diane, we can cash checks in Nome, just like in Lakewood, Colorado. I am always amazed by the ideas people in the Lower 48 have about Alaska and especially Bush Alaska.

They think we live on some other planet, only vaguely connected to the United States by some esoteric political tie, and that we do not have 1.) telephones, 2.) television 3.) movie theaters 4.) banks 5.) check cashing services 6.) beauty parlors 7.) supermarkets or 8.) newspapers or radio stations.

There are a great many other things our Lower 48 cousins don't think we have, perhaps it's best to let

them think what they want to think so the state doesn't get too crowded.

Hawaii told everybody everything and look what happened there? Joni Mitchell wasn't kidding when she sang: "They paved paradise and they put up a parking lot."

Thankfully, there are no plans at the moment to pave Nome and put up a parking lot, although in the past there have been developers who wanted to put in parking meters on Nome's historic and unbelievably wide Front Street. Parking meters don't belong in Nome and so they aren't here. But to answer my Colorado correspondent's letter: yes, we do have bananas!

You can cash a check almost anywhere in Alaska, no matter how small the community or village. I've had no trouble cashing checks in Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island, nor in villages like Shishmaref or Teller. But Alaska is so far away from Colorado that this financial fact is probably very hard to believe. Ignorance can be bliss. In this case, it's just funny.

Actually, you can do almost anything in Nome that you can do any place else on Earth.

There's the greasy spoon lunch counter, the fancy restaurants, two newspaper offices, two radio stations, a bunch of drinking establishments otherwise known as bars, a dance hall which also doubles as a kind of Bush nightclub, a pizza parlor, a Korean restaurant, a second-hand store, two department stores, two supermarkets, videogames, magazine racks, libraries and 13 television channels to choose from when you get bored.

It's difficult to get bored in Nome because if you get bored you're in trouble and nobody who lives here wants to be in trouble so everyone does their best not to get bored which is easy if you've got two legs and two arms and a bunch of other things.

But, yes, Diane, we can cash your checks in Nome.