



Larry Evanoff, Chenega Village Council chairman and his wife Gail, the council's president, join Don Kompkoff in looking at pictures taken at the site where they plan to build the community of New Chenega. The old Chenega was destroyed in the earthquake and tidal wave of 1964. In an old photograph taken in the community school in 1945, Kompkoff is the second student from the left.

Despite time, problems, Chenega residents still plan return

By **BILL HESS**
Tundra Times Staff

Almost 18 years after the great earthquake and tidal wave of 1964 destroyed their village and drove them from their homes, the people of Chenega still plan their return. Soon, they say, whether help is forthcoming or not.

"I just think of it as home," says Larry Evanoff, chairman of the Chenega Village Council, and president of the village corporation. "I want to see all the people together again. I remember the village as a fun place, a place where everybody always kind of helped each other out. Nobody kept anything locked. If someone went hunting, they left their house open. Then if someone was in a bad way, they were welcome to come in."

"It gave you a feeling of belonging. It was a far cry different from Anchorage, Evanoff's current home, where everybody is a stranger, where monetary values are put ahead of everything else. Where there is barbed wire. It all gives you a

feeling of being alone." Evanoff was 14 when the disaster struck.

His wife, Gail, did not grow up in Chenega, but as president of the Village Council, she is a vigorous supporter of the move to build a New Chenega. Her childhood village of Candle was also destroyed by fire, giving her empathy with the people whose interests she represents.

There were about 120 residents of Chenega when the earth shook and then the water swept in and washed everything away, except for the schoolhouse which sat on a hill. Twenty-three of these, including Larry Evanoff's parents, were killed. The survivors found refuge in Tatitlek, but most later moved to Cordova.

Through it all the villagers kept their sense of community. Although no one was living in Chenega when the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act passed in 1971, the Chenega survivors were able to form a village corporation in the Chugach region under a special "Act of God" clause.

Sixty-nine shareholders are enrolled in the corporation. They also have formed a village council under provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act.

Since that time, the council has been busy planning its community, and seeking help to do so. Three alternate sites covering 69,000 acres were selected. Village members plan to build New Chenega at Crab Bay, 15 boat miles from the old townsite. Crab Bay provides a natural harbor and an area relatively clear of the dense forest which rises from the waters of Prince William Sound. It also should be less susceptible to annihilation in the event of a repeat of 1964, as is evidenced by the still standing remains of an abandoned cannery which survived the tidal wave.

The quest to rebuild has been met with frustrating delays and red tape. Help was sought through the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Emergency Relief program, but the Chenega people learned that aid given

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Federal money to pay to rebuild new Chenega homes

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them in relocating to new areas after the earthquake was all that they qualified for under the program.

In 1981, the BIA provided a \$7,381.50 grant which was used to hold a community meeting in October, and to keep open a council office in Anchorage. The funds have been cut by 45 percent this year.

The state legislature last year approved a \$225,000 grant for planning, engineering, and surveying in the New Chenega townsite, but this was taken out of the budget by Governor Jay Hammond. The community will be lobbying for the funds during the current legislative session, with the services of Community Regional Affairs.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development originally turned down the villagers' request for housing, but last fall finally approved 23 applications for homes to be built in New Chenega. Funds for their construction have not actually been released, however, and with the budget cutting of the Reagan administration, construction can't be guaranteed until the money is actually received.

Aides to U.S. Senator Ted Stevens and U.S. Rep. Don Young note that the final HUD appropriations for this fiscal year were signed into law just before Christmas. Now the appropriation is in the Office of Management and Budget where it must be assigned to the different area offices by the end of January. Rick Agnew of Young's office notes that the Chenega homes have been a top priority rating in the Anchorage area, and that their outlook is "pretty good." Pam Rubinstein, press secretary to Stevens indicates that funding for the 23 homes is virtually assured.

In addition to the HUD homes, which are priced at \$1.8 million, the council has projected water and sewer construction costs at \$3 million, roads and trails at \$117,000, a school and community center complete with a medical clinic, post office, council and corporation offices, and a community room at \$500,000 to be built with a HUD community development block grant; a dock to berth up to 30 fishing vessels at \$225,000 and an Alaska Native Industries Co-operative Association store, complete with stock, at \$100,000.

The figures have been reached with the help of different governmental agencies, such as the Alaska Department of Transportation, whose help is being sought in obtaining them. Studies are underway to determine the costs and best methods of providing power to New Chenega.

Additionally, community members seek an airstrip, but have been told by state officials that they want to see a community in place before they attempt to justify the cost

of construction.

Whatever happens, the Evanoffs say their new community will be founded come June. "We're moving back this summer," Gail Evanoff emphasizes. "If it's going to be in tents, it's going to be in tents! The government agencies want to see our plans before they justify our moving back. We say, let us build our community, then we can see what plans will work out best. But we are going back. My children will go to school next fall in Chenega!"

The Evanoffs express optimism in the potential for economic development for New Chenega. "We know there are several good opportunities for Chenega," Evanoff stresses. "The sound offers great fishing and tourism potential. We can provide a stopping place for recreationists to refuel, eat and sleep. Most of our people are fishers. There is a potential to build a new cannery."

A Prince William Sound

Aquaculture Corporation would like to build a road from New Chenega to their hatchery facilities, and would look for workers among the Chenega population. Most of their help is currently imported from the Lower 48, or urban areas such as Anchorage and Juneau.

The potential for a small sawmill, whose product could be used for building a dock as well as telephone poles and other export needs, also is being explored. Leo Barlow, coordinator of the Alaska Industrial Council, notes that the village has applied for \$13,000 aid for training in sawmill skills at the Alaska Vocational and Technical Center in Seward. "We are supportive of the concept," Barlow says, but stresses that the council has yet to make any decision.

"We have encouraged them to work with their ideas," he notes, adding that there is "tremendous potential for

their approach, and for their concept of starting a sawmill operation."

Ms. Evanoff contends the culture of what is believed to have been the oldest village in Prince William Sound will be lost if New Chenega is not built. There also are a number of important archaeological sites in the area. "A lot has been taken from these sites by people who are interested only in their monetary Ms. Evanoff notes. "We could help preserve these sites. What they want money for, we want respect!"

Approximately 70 people would fill the 23 HUD homes. Others among them also emphasize their desire to return. "Oh, we have wanted to go back for so many years," explains John Vlasoff, a Chenega elder. "We have wanted to have our own home there for a long time. I guess since I was a little boy." Vlasoff lives in Cordova.

"I just love village life,"

adds Dotty Pavak, also of Cordova. "I want to get out of town. It is so expensive here!

I have so many bills. Sure, I will have bills in Chenega but it won't be so bad when we can support ourselves and at least you wouldn't have to contend with the booze, bars, and drugs that you have here!"

"You better believe it, I will!" Pavak answers when asked if she would be willing to go back this summer even if it means tent living for a while.

Although Evanoff admits that life in New Chenega would not be exactly like it was in the past, perhaps unattended homes could not be left unlocked for long periods of time; he still believes residents will have a strong sense of community, and will help each other. "I want my children to know village life," he stresses.

"We don't want anyone to feel sorry for us," adds his wife. "We feel we deserve to be able to go back. We're not asking something for nothing. We are tax payers too, by golly! We pay our way!"