

NANA houselift largest in state

They're calling it the largest airlift ever in the state for an independent contractor.

And it may be the largest airlift ever for an Alaskan Native and American Indian Housing Authority in the country.

A mammoth housing project in northwest Alaska and its transport of materials to Kotzebue and nine villages qualified as the largest single airlift. Tommy Sheldon, executive director of the NANA Housing Authority, is overseer to the huge \$12 million housing project which will provide 168 new homes in the villages of Ambler, Buckland, Deering, Kiana, Kivalina, Kobuk, Noorvik, Selawik and Shungnak.

Sheldon announced the award of the construction of homes to Arctic Jomax Construction, a minority owned firm based in Kotzebue. An on-site award of \$1,461,850 also was given to the Anchorage-based Spruce Construction to provide water and sewer to the 25 new homes in Ambler, 24 in Kiana and 18 in Shungnak. Sheldon said this was the first time ever in the nation that a Housing Authority awarded a water and sewer contract. According to Sheldon, the water and sewer projects are usually handled by the Public Health Service, but he explains, "With this project we wanted to provide a complete package to our clients. We wanted it done all at once." PHS does set specifications which are to be met by the contractor.

Dan Rogness of the PHS in Anchorage, also added, "The Housing Authority and the PHS are actively looking into an add/on contract to extend the water and sewer project in Ambler. It makes sense to complete a program and it saves dollars when you have the equipment already

up there." Jerry Fletcher, president of Spruce Construction says, "We are happy to be working with the Housing Authority and to be working in the Bush." Fletcher said that Spruce is using all new pipe for the water and sewer project. The pipes will be below ground. Spruce also has a separate contract with the State of Alaska to upgrade the Kobuk airfield.

Sheldon, an Inupiat Eskimo, is credited with starting up the NANA Construction Company and was former president of the Kotzebue Village Corporation. "I don't play politics, I'm a do-er. Nobody has ever done this before (built 168 houses) in six months. And I've got three months to go." Thus far he is on schedule.

Both Sheldon and May Kenworthy, the Housing Authority's manager, are pleased with the award to Arctic Jomax and their progress in construction. As of press time, the Housing Authority's clients in Kiana, Kivalina and Buckland already have moved in. Kenworthy says, "Arctic Jomax has had two previous contracts with us. Their problems in construction from those projects are ironed out, corrected and not repeated in these homes. They get better each time."

The houses range in size from two to four bedrooms. They come equipped with refrigerators, a furnace (with a gravity fed system) and baseboard heating with thermostat manual control. They come with two stoves: a propane cooking stove with oven, and a wood stove. The stoves come with circulating fans to efficiently heat the homes.

Sheldon and Kenworthy stress the homes are not just another hand-out for the Bush, although their clients are primarily low income subsistence-oriented Alaskan Natives. The clients, they say, have applied

for and have acquired 25-year leases on their new homes with monthly payments ranging from \$65 to \$250. The Housing Authority puts a certain amount of the client's payment into equity which the client can later draw on for proposed home improvements. The monthly payments do not include utilities and clients are responsible for their own water and sewer, electricity and heating bills. Should financial problems arise, the Housing Authority also can provide a budget for a client or refer the client to other agencies. The Housing Authority also employs a counselor to advise the clients on the maintenance and upkeep of their new homes.

Because of the enormous housing project, Sheldon estimates almost 400 new jobs were created in Kotzebue and the nine villages. At one point, the Housing Authority and its contractors' weekly payrolls came to \$373,000. The Housing Authority also employs inspectors for the duration of construction to make sure all the houses meet contract specifications.

There have been no major obstacles or problems confronted in this huge housing project. One house was destroyed by fire in Kiana recently but was quickly replaced.

Arctic Jomax chose Gifford Aviation of Anchorage to be the carrier of the construction materials and support materials and equipment. Spenard Building Supply of Anchorage provided materials and stoves to Arctic Jomax. SBS also built the trusses in Anchorage to be shipped up to the northwest villages.

Jack Gifford of Gifford Aviation, says his carrier is in a joint venture with its subsidiary Kodiak Western Airways. The joint venture had five C-119's, two Skyvans, a DC 4 Corvair and two Sikorsky-58 helicopters making 19 trips a day out of Anchorage, Kotzebue and Ambler and averaging six trips a day out of Dahl Creek which is near Kobuk and Shungnak, at the height of the airlift. "We are the only carrier in the state with the ability to perform point to point delivery without using additional carriers," Gifford says.

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