

# Mount Edgecumbe reunion begins, 300 arrive

By Bill Hess

Tundra Times Staff

More than 300 alumni of Mount Edgecumbe BIA boarding school gathered in the school's assembly hall Monday to hear strong calls from their peers to keep their former school open.

More former students had been expected but poor weather caused many airplane flights into Sitka to be cancelled and an accident of the ferry boat Aurora two weeks ago reduced access to Sitka.

One of the most rousing speeches of the day was given by Eleanor Weedman, a current Mount Edgecumbe student who is vice president of the student council.

She addressed the theme, "We are Family," pled for alumni support in keeping

Mount Edgecumbe open, and expressed joy that the school will not close this year as originally scheduled, but will be open for the 1982-83 school year.

"We joyfully and gratefully received the news that Mount Edgecumbe High School will be open for another year.

"However, the battle is not yet over. We must ensure that Mount Edgecumbe High School will be here for many years to come in order to meet the needs of those future leaders of Alaska who still have need for a school . . . We must not rest until this goal is achieved.

"We cannot afford to become lax just because this school has been given a year's reprieve. There is much work to do."

School Supt. Leroy Demmert also hailed the postponement of Edgecumbe's closure. "It is especially comforting to this year's juniors, for them to know they will be able to graduate next year," Demmert said.

"They will not have to have their four years in high school interrupted during their last year."

As to reports of cutbacks next year, which could force the elimination of some Edgecumbe programs, perhaps sports, Demmert said he has received no official word. "With Mount Edgecumbe things have changed so rapidly, week to week, for the last two years, I hesitate to say we might be cut back in some areas, and then have some students get discouraged and

not come to Mount Edgecumbe next year."

At the Alaska Federation of Natives convention last December (someone) told us in the morning that Mount Edgecumbe would definitely close its doors at the end of this school year. It was not six hours later that we received word that the cutoff had been extended another year. I really feel we should be allowed to run a full program as long as we are open.

"It would really be unfair to the students not to. Students travel to Mount Edgecumbe from rural areas, to take advantage of larger programs than are available at their homes. As long as we are open, we should have a full range of programs."

Mayor John Dapcevich of Sitka voiced his city's support for Mount Edgecumbe. He told the group of efforts which involved Gov. Jay Hammond in the process to keep the school open. Should the school be cut from the federal budget, Dapcevich urged alumni to petition state officials to have the state take over the school's operations.

John Hope, president of Tlingit/Haida Central Council, strongly stressed that it is a federal and not a state

responsibility to keep Mount Edgecumbe open. "The federal government has a trust responsibility to all the aboriginal people of the country," he said. He stressed that Alaska Natives have a lot of political clout available to them.

He suggested that alumni put political pressure particularly on U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens who is the only member of the Alaska Congressional delegation to not support Edgecumbe.

Frank O. Williams, chairman of the Edgecumbe reunion committee, noted that the state Board of Education is on record as supporting the closure of Mount Edgecumbe, and urged alumni to work to get this stance changed.

A committee of alumni members was formed to work up a resolution and a position paper in support of keeping Mount Edgecumbe open.

There were many activities for participants at the reunion, including performances by the Barrow Eskimo dancers, alumni cheerleaders, and alumni basketball teams.

Rep. Al Adams chairman of the Alaska House Finance Committee, was scheduled to address the group Monday night.