

Acting director appointed to attorney's office

Alaska has been called the "land of lawyers" because of the many legal wrangles binding the new frontier. The North Slope Borough covers a large part of the State and has inherited its share of the legal load. The man who now deals with the Borough's daily legal work is Harold Curran.

Curran was appointed Acting Director of the Borough Law Office by the Borough Assembly Dec. 1, 1981, replacing Conrad Bagne. Curran had served as an Assistant Attorney under Bagne since September. The Borough is presently recruiting to fill the assistant attorney spot left open by Curran's appointment.

A two-attorney office cannot handle all of the Borough's legal dealings, so, as Curran explains, other attorneys and

law firms are retained on the Borough's behalf. At the helm, the new Acting Director sees himself as primarily a coordinator of these services.

"My responsibility here is as an overseer or a coordinator. I work closely with the Borough's contracted law firm, Martin and Farrel, in Anchorage and handle the day-to-day legal matters like drawing up contracts, handling personnel legal questions and keeping current on any lawsuit proceedings."

In his duties Curran finds merging the written legal system with the oral traditions of the Inupiaq to be a major challenge.

"If you have an oral tradition that deals with land that is completely contrary to the way the United States and its

legal system deals with land, oral is out. It's all written. It's all recorded. So if you don't write and you don't record it, legally it's hard to enforce your rights."

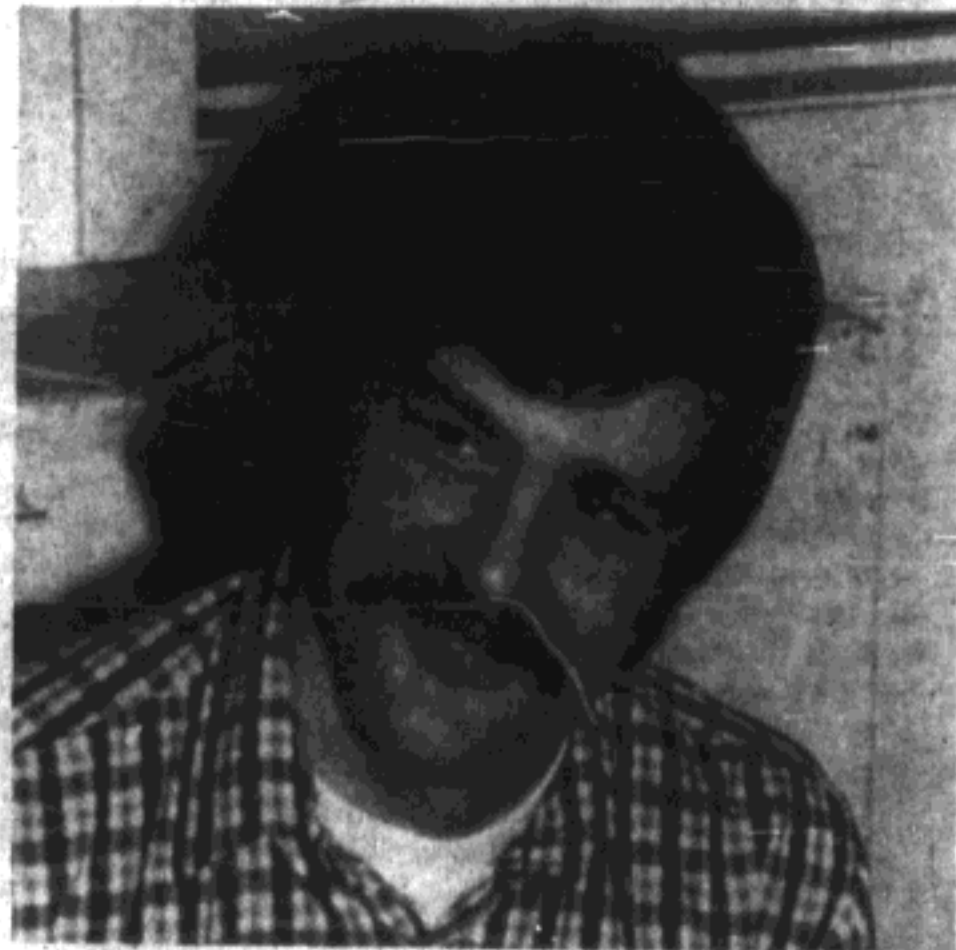
In dealing with the different traditions, Curran sees his role as one of education. Some of the legal questions that come up are unique to the conditions and culture of the North Slope. Those cases are an education for the legal system, as well as the laymen. Curran and his legal colleagues dub such new circumstances "matters of first impression."

Curran cites the Native Claims Settlement Act and its method of dealing with land as a wellspring of matters of first impression. "The Native Claims Settlement Act established various systems that are quite familiar to non-Native American society, yet at the same time, these systems have been superimposed over a Native tradition and culture which is not familiar with them. So the process is one of education, not just establishing systems to deal with divisions of money and divisions of land."

One of Curran's goals is to increasingly systematize the dealings of the Law Office so that it has to react less and less to "crisis situations."

As an example, the Acting Director uses the cases that make up most of his daily work load — contract procedures. "It is not that we've failed to meet contract requirements in the past," says Curran. "It's just that I want to establish procedures to meet them more efficiently."

Before joining the Borough in September, Curran worked with the law firm of Martin and Farrell in Anchorage. He has been in Alaska for five years. He received his education at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.



Law Office Acting Director Harold Curran says, "... if you don't write and you don't record it, legally it's hard to enforce your rights."