



Sorrow at leaving Mount Edgecumbe and his many friends there is reflected in the tears running down the face of Sam Kivolik of New Stuyahok, even as the joy of graduating radiates from his smile. Kivolik is an expert tumbler.

Edgecumbe to close for 83 - 84

By Bill Hess
Tundra Times

Alaska Governor Bill Sheffield last week chose one of the two options included in a U.S. Senate supplemental appropriations bill on keeping Mount Edgecumbe Boarding School alive but not the one favored by most Alaska Natives.

Senator Ted Stevens had inserted \$31.35 million into the bill; \$22 million to renovate a deteriorating Mount Edgecumbe, with the rest to upgrade 20 Bureau of Indian Affairs day schools in Rural Alaska.

Under the language of the bill, which will be considered by the full Senate sometime after June 6, Sheffield apparently had the option to have the school shut down for one year to bring facilities up to state safety codes, or to divert about \$4.5 million of those funds to the BIA to operate the school next year while upgrade work was being carried out.

Before Sheffield made his announcement, Mount Edgecumbe Superintendent LeRoy Demmert expressed his fears that closing the school

down for one year would be detrimental to the future of the school, especially if the state's goal is "to continue a Mount Edgecumbe program as we now know it," under the BIA.

"You'd lose teaching staff and dormitory staff; people who know how to successfully run a boarding school. You'd lose much of the student body." After that, said Demmert, it would be a big challenge to build Edgecumbe back up. Whatever happened, Demmert stressed, the state would have to make a firm and longstanding commitment to Mount Edgecumbe to find success.

The overriding sentiment among Alaska Natives is that Edgecumbe is needed to fully meet their educational needs.

Those who have questioned the continued operation of Mount Edgecumbe argue that since a great deal of effort and money have been spent establishing schools in most Alaska villages, the village schools should be given the chance to work. They point out that when a student leaves a village to go to Mt. Edgecumbe, less state money comes into the village school.

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Edgecumbe's last days under the BIA



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"My response has been that I think local secondary programs are necessary," said Demmert, who will take over the job of principal at Blatchley Junior High in Sitka next year. "I believe families who want their sons and daughters educated at home should be able to have that."

"I also believe it takes a variety of educational programs to meet the needs across the state. I believe the boarding school concept is still a necessary, valuable option in Alaska . . . hopefully, Mount Edgecumbe and the rural schools can work hand in hand to meet all these needs."

Tribal leaders in different parts of the state expressed annoyance over recent developments with Edgecumbe and the BIA day schools. Ivan M. Ivan of the Association of Village Council Presidents and Bill Brady of the Sitka Community Association sent telegrams to Senator Stevens expressing concern over "the lack of participation by the Alaska Native Community in the continuing negotiations" over Edgecumbe and the day schools.

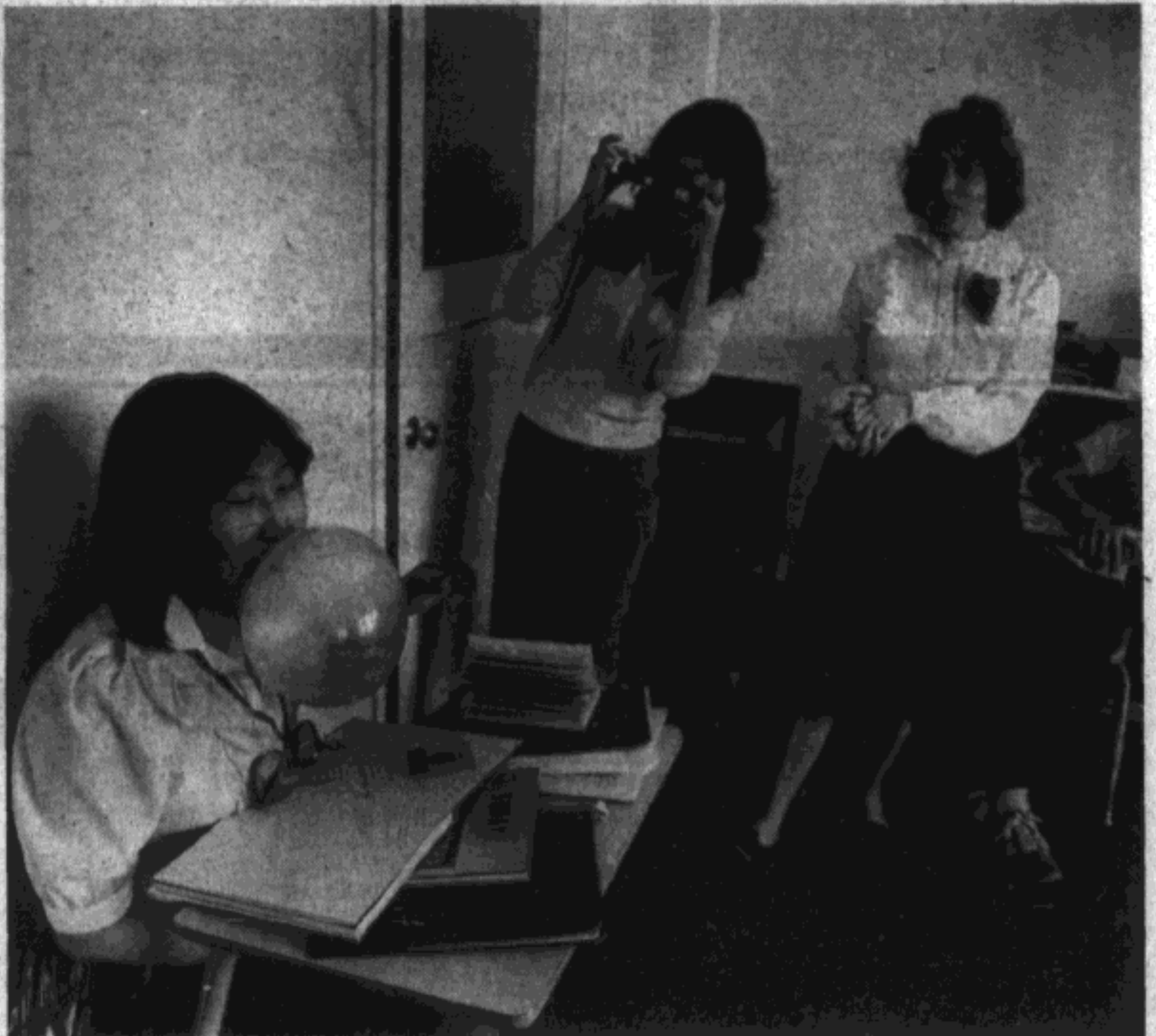
"It's very presumptuous of them to be bargaining away our rights without consulting us about it," said Andy Hope, manager for SCA. Hope charged that despite letters and phone calls to the governor's office, the tribes had been left

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TAHETA is the name of the Mount Edgecumbe yearbook. TAHETA: Tlingit-Aleut-Haida-Eskimo-Tsimpsian-Athabaskan. "You meet a lot of the different people from all over the state," explains James Savok, Jr., of Barrow. "When you get older, you will run across them sometimes. You'll have friends in different villages. It will be fun." Many of today's Alaskan political and business leaders are graduates from Edgecumbe. Like Alaska House Finance Committee Chairman Al Adams, they say the associations they made with people from all regions of Alaska while attending school have proved invaluable to them today. Yearbook contemplation and signing was the most popular activity at Edgecumbe during this school year's last days. Suzy Sam and Eddie Pitka share a few TAHETA memories at a junior class picnic. All of Edgecumbe's days as a BIA boarding school are now memories.



Janet Williams of Hughes bursts out in smiles as she takes her first look at her report card from Rod Nutting's class. Williams, who was teased for walking into her last class period ever at Edgecumbe just a few minutes late; the first time she had been tardy this year, earned an "A." Sandra Beatus, also of Hughes, appears much more grim as she reads a newspaper article speculating on the future, or possible lack of a future, of the school of whose "family" she has become a member.



Substitute teacher Susan McCarthy would not tolerate bubble gum chewing in any of the classes she taught. The clicking, smacking and snapping; all this could be very annoying and distracting, as could the sudden explosions which would leave students with gum stuck to their eyebrows and noses. The students, however, loved to chew gum. So when McCarthy found herself teaching a land claims class the last day of school, she gave her students one assignment: to blow the biggest chewing gum bubble possible. Eleanor Sebwnna, above, a senior from Nome, managed to do that and won a candy bar for her talent.

Photos and text by Bill Hess

Tribal leaders complain of being left out of Edgecumbe negotiations

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out of the negotiations, which he said were basically conducted through the media between the state and the feds.

The mayor of Sitka was heavily involved, he said, but not the Native community of Sitka. Hope also expressed concern that the federal government was dropping its responsibility to Alaska Natives in turning Mount Edgecumbe over to the state.

He felt that with federal money being spent to benefit Natives, there should be some means established to assure that the majority of students would come from Rural Alaska and that Native employment in the new organization would be high. Hope also felt that rather than turning all the facilities over to the state, some should instead be turned over to Native organizations.

The 180 students who fin-

ished the year at Mount Edgecumbe seem virtuously unanimous in their desire to keep the school open. Emily Brower of Barrow and Ted Hamilton of Emmonak, expressed the sentiments of most of their classmates, the new seniors, when they stressed their desire to graduate from Edgecumbe. "I really love it here," said Brower. "It's just like my home. The atmosphere, the feeling, the friendship!"

Hamilton, who has been very active in Edgecumbe activities, said it would be hard for him to get involved in a new school. Edgecumbe, he said, has a better environment for learning than anyplace else he could attend, and more activities to become involved in.

Without Edgecumbe as an option next year, Brower, Hamilton and their classmates will

be attending schools throughout the state and elsewhere. Demmert noted that 24 students had applied and been accepted at Chemawa, a BIA boarding school in Oregon.

Eleanor Weedman, a graduating senior and past student council president, led the student drive to keep Mount Edgecumbe open. Students wrote well over 1,000 letters to influential politicians and business officials under Weedman's leadership, and she personally visited with many legislators in Juneau.

"I just want people to continue, to keep on fighting," Weedman said. "No matter how bad the situation looks. People keep saying, 'gee, there's no hope.' Until you've fought to the very last minute, you'll never really feel like you've accomplished something."