

# **"Work hard, and don't get discouraged." A new generation of entrepreneurs**

Two hundred Alaskans wanted to sign up. Only 36 were accepted. Some of the applicants almost pleaded to get in.

"All I have is seasonal employment," was a common reason. "I want something for my kids when they come back from college," said a resident of Southeast.

The course they wanted was a three and a half week session on entrepreneurship — how to start a business and make it successful.

To select the top candidates a series of workshops was held throughout the state. "Are you sure you really want to be in business?" The candidates were asked. "It means long hours, low pay, and slow pay out."

Many said yes because they had heard of the success of a similar session held a year ago which was attended by 18 residents from Southwest Alaska. It had been led by Dr. George Kanahale and Dr. Gene Wanl, leaders of the Hawaiian Entrepreneurship Training and Development Institute.

The overwhelming conclusion of that first session was that entrepreneurship training is the best way to assist rural residents.

A graduate from last year, Mike Moses of M & M Taxi in Mountain Village, illustrated the success of the program when he spoke to this year's class. The owner of the "fastest taxi on the

Yukon," Moses urged that this year's participants persevere. "You can do it," he said. "I did it. Work hard, and don't get discouraged."

Meeting in May in Bethel, the students became immersed in the "Hetadi Method" designed by the Hawaiians. It stresses support for private initiative, helps arrange financing and provides follow-up consulting.

Beginning with the question "How do I get started?" each student wrote a mission statement including what they want out of life. Seminar trainers stressed "that you have to have your life in order to have your business in order."

Before the session was over each student was featured as a luncheon speaker and then had to present a finished business plan to a panel of experts, including a banker.

CEDC and other Alaskan businesses and agencies helped fund the training program and will provide ongoing support. National Bank of Alaska is providing a \$2,000-5,000 line of credit for many of the new businesses started by the students. These signature loans are the first of their kind in the nation.

Students and advisors worked from 9:00 AM-11:00 PM six days a week and found themselves both exhausted and exhilarated.

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*1990 graduates and staff of entrepreneurship program are all smiles prior to graduation ceremonies at Yukon Kuskokwim Community College, Bethel.*

**New generation continued:**

## **"If you succeed, others will succeed."**

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Hal Davis, a business analyst with CEDC's Minority Business Development Center who worked with the new entrepreneurs during the training session, described the experience as one of the most exciting and positive of his career.

The program was sparked by Rene Patten, the community development coordinator for the Yukon Kuskokwim Community College. Patten secured a grant from the Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development and then lined up support from profit and non-profit corporations throughout the state. She is convinced that the program will pay off.

"The entrepreneurial environment is not foreign to the Native culture," she says. "It's been there all along. Trading has been a part of the way of life. It's the words that aren't understood — like amortization and capitalization. But the concepts are easily understood. We just give them a map, and we urge them to use their cultural values as strengths in their businesses."

One of the innovations of the program is a contract with CEDC to provide ongoing support and training to guarantee long-term success. Each one of the graduates has been assigned to an MBDC consultant.



Photo courtesy of Timothy Deane

*Ted Moses (left), director of the Mekoryuk reindeer project, works on his marketing plan with CEDC's Hal Davis, a business analyst with the Minority Business Development Center.*



Sophie Polk, a Bethel resident, wrote the best business plan of this year's class. A newscaster on local TV, Polk speaks English, Yupik and Spanish. Her new business will provide interpretation, especially for Yupik-speaking elders. Her business plan will help her determine markets, promotions and pricing.

Ted Moses, who spent 30 years with the FAA, has returned to Mekoryuk as director of the reindeer project. He has acquired a grant to upgrade slaughter facilities and has begun marketing reindeer meat to specialty shops in Denver and will soon explore San Francisco and other markets.

At the graduation ceremony, Orie Williams of the CEDC board made a strong appeal to the graduates to combine their culture with their business. "If you succeed, others will succeed."

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