

Reporters know little of Village history

by Linda Lord-Jenkins

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Big city newspaper reporters have little knowledge of the history of the people and events they report on in rural areas according to a man who works for the North Slope Borough's Arctic Science Policy Review.

Speaking at the kick-off session of an Alaska Press Club meeting, Bill DuBay told the journalists from across the state that he believes they don't put things in historical perspective and therefore, shortchange the people they write about and for.

DuBay told the journalists that the people in Alaska's rural areas are very political and very involved in events surrounding them.

"A lot of young journalist aren't political. They can't relate to any political groups. . . Politics in all these movements are very historical. They involve the deepest aspirations of the group. They are passed from parent to child."

He cited author David Boeri who recently wrote "People of the Ice Whale," a book about his three seasons spent on Gambell and in Barrow during the times of whale hunting.

"His was a sentimental book but he didn't understand the movement. . . He didn't see the significance of the Eskimo Whaling Commission which was a major strategic ploy to take management (of whaling) from the feds."

In urging reporters to look to the past when they write about anything, DuBay used the conflict in Central America as an example of limited reporters' vision. "They leave off the history. They treat the issue as if it began in 1979."

DuBay told the reporters that when they write about rural Alaska they must remember that they are "very much not the company towns that

Anchorage is. They are all family and tribes.

"A lot of reporters have never experienced that sense of community and, as a result, a lot of journalists want to win the Pulitzer Prize, they don't get involved in the class struggle and miss out on the good things about how people make progress toward a certain goal."

DuBay said that reporters should not confuse journalistic objectivity with detachment. Objectivity reports both sides of the story. Detachment keeps a reporter from being involved at all.

Mike Doogan, who worked in Juneau with the Legislature when the Alaska Permanent

Fund was approved, agreed with the view that the history of events isn't reported.

"By and large, the press leaves context out of things and there is a tendency to get less and less background of things."

He ruefully recounted the phrases he hears repeatedly when people write about Alaska. "The government has so much money they give it away; the sun shines all summer; there are bears coming into town and they give money away."

But, when talking about the Permanent Fund "no one mentions that this is something that has been discussed as far back as statehood."

DuBay picked up on the misunderstanding of Alaska by outsiders and said "We say that the North Slope Borough is Alaska's Alaska."

Reporters are very unsympathetic about the Borough's budget, said DuBay. "You find all sorts of people hanging around the borough to find a scandal."

He cited the example of publicity surrounding a double murder in Barrow several years ago. "The troopers said it was an act of Eskimo terrorism and

it was picked up by the news media and it got out of hand.

"It spread like wildfire and the people suffered great indignities and shame as a result of that for months after."

He also chastized the reporters that "You don't regard these people as important so you don't think what they have to say is important."

"You guys are story tellers. You want to tell stories and make money." Reporters should be more like sociologists. You have to get within the tribe and experience their values. You can learn from the science of human behavior.

"You can get involved with issues and still write a good story," said DuBay.

