

Statewide TV network helps rural workers find jobs

by Tom Alton
Editor, *The Council*

How does a skilled worker living in rural Alaska find employment in the job market outside the village?

The process has usually been lengthy and expensive. The worker has traveled to the nearest city and waited, paying transportation and lodging costs until he could land a job through a state Job Service office or union hall. He had no way of knowing whether or not a specific job would be open when he arrived in the city. The people who lived in the city had a distinct advantage, and unemployment increased in the villages.

But now Alaska's telecommunication network could be the tool skilled workers need to build a system of equitable hiring. Twelve times a week current job listings from all over the state are beamed by satellite to television sets in 220 rural communities. An electrician at home in Galena now can respond to a job announcement within minutes by calling the Job Service office in Fairbanks. Secretaries, carpenters, mechanics, cannery workers and dozens of others can use the state-owned system to link the villages to the points in the cities where job calls go out.

TCC, the Learn/Alaska Television Network and the state Department of Labor work together to produce *The Alaska Work Scene*. The 15-minute video program combines job listings with bits of information on various oc-

cupations and job-hunting tips. It is designed to improve rural residents' access to the job market.

Here's how it works: Three mornings a week Elizabeth Cook asks Job Service centers around the state to send her appropriate job listings. As the rural services supervisor for the state Department of labor in Fairbanks, Cook is responsible for increasing village employment opportunities in the villages. The state is divided into three regions — Northern, Central and Southeastern — and a separate *Alaska Work Scene* is taped for each one.

Instant communications are important from the beginning. The job listings start to come into Cook's office immediately. TCC Employment Technician Priscilla Roth then organizes that information according to job title, location, pay and requirements needed. The listing is complete enough to tell the job seeker if he is able to apply for the job. For a carpenter, the listing will include the kind of specific experience needed and whether the employer requires the worker to supply tools. It will tell whether a secretary needs to know how to operate a personal computer.

By early afternoon, Roth is at the TCC Video Center working with producer Jim Shannon taping that day's program. While Roth types the job listings and converts them to the television screen, Shannon dubs in the voice-over and includes taped material to fill the 15 minutes.

The final product includes up to 40 openings. Besides Job Service listings, the program covers state government job openings and recruitments. "On the Scene" is a regular segment of the program. It provides video clips and information to help people decide on an occupation. Skilled workers such as foresters, sanitarians, painters and lab technicians talk about the kind of work they do. The segment tells people how to pursue a particular career if they are interested.

choices," she says. "We want to allow people to follow through on their own."

Those goals are being met through the electronic communications network. The statewide system has solved the problems of isolation and distance. Cook says she has no way of knowing how many rural residents have found jobs through *Alaska Work Scene*, but in the past year she has seen a definite increase in timely applications from the villages.



Priscilla Roth and Jim Shannon prepare a tape for *Alaska Work Scene*.