

AVI offers rural tourism seminars for communities, individuals

Alaska Village Initiatives' Rural Tourism Center is looking to coordinate rural tourism seminars for Alaska communities interested in learning more about tourism development and management. These custom-designed seminars take into consideration each community's infrastructure development and progress in setting up a tourism industry. All rural-based Alaska communities or individuals are encouraged to use the Center's services free of charge.

"In cooperation with other tourism organization, such as the Alaska Visitors Association (AVA), the Alaska Tourism Marketing Council (ATMC), and the Alaska Division of Tourism, we have already organized seminars in several areas such as Nome, Bethel and Unalaska. We have found these seminars to be most helpful in allowing communities to define their roles in tourism development," said Carolyn Bettes, coordinator of the Rural Tourism Center.

Rural Tourism Seminar topics might include how to assess a community's tourism potential; the current state of rural tourism; community development and tour planning; how to create a successful tour product; ways to work with tourism partners; tourism associations and how they work; business planning; identifying visitor needs; and marketing.

A combination of guest speakers and local experts are typically used to lead a seminar. There is no cost for using the Center's coordination services, but those interested in holding a seminar could be asked to pay for room rental, refreshments, background materials and, in some cases, travel expenses for guest speakers.

The Center was created a year ago to assist individuals, companies and communities interested in developing rural tourism products and services. It has already helped more than 75 individuals deter-

mine their next step in the tourism development process and has served as an important link between economic development and the tourism industry.

Over the last year, the Center also has created a tourism development resource library, developed a network of rural tourism contacts and completed a survey of lodges in rural Alaska. Another survey, to define the different types of rural tour products, is planned for the coming year.

"Interest in the potential of tourism in rural areas of the state continues to grow," said Bettes. "I encourage anyone who is considering their options in the tourism

industry to contact us."

For more information on seminar coordination or other services, call the Center toll-free at 1-800-848-2332 or, in Anchorage, at (907) 274-5400. Or write to 1577 C St., Suite 304, Anchorage, Alaska 99501.

The Rural Tourism Center is a joint venture between the Alaska Division of Tourism and Alaska Village Initiatives, a non-profit, membership-based company dedicated to improving the well-being of rural Alaska communities, families and individuals. The Center also receives support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development.