

Calista forms International Corporation

By Bill Hess
Tundra Times

The leadership at Calista Corporation believes it has found a way to both spread its economic influence in Alaska and the world, and to help shareholders in rural villages to create jobs and local revenues, coupled with lower prices on many items.

Early this week, Calista Corporation president and chief

executive officer Alex Raider announced the formation of Calista International Corporation (CIC).

According to Raider, the new corporation, which will have offices in Tokyo and Seattle as well as Anchorage, will be the first true import-export operation in the state of Alaska.

Although Raider said that details would be made known

as further developments took place, he said the corporation is actively exploring entering into joint venture agreements with many leading Japanese firms. In fact, said Raider, the man selected to head the Tokyo office, Masaru Nishimura, is an expert in international trade and is "one of the best known gentlemen in Japan."

Nishimura was present at the press conference, as was

Zul M. Devji, who will head operations from the Anchorage office, and Victor Kihara, in charge of Seattle dealings.

The corporation will also seek to increase the exploration of fish, fur, and arts and crafts to Pacific Rim countries especially Japan.

Raider did say that the possibility of joint venturing with foreign firms to exploit some of the mineral wealth that lies within Calista's land holdings in Southwest Alaska will also be explored.

The decision to form the new corporation was made partially in response to a recently passed Export Trading Act, said Raider, which makes dealing on the international market more simple.

Although Calista International Corporation should help the corporation in its drive to become "one of the premier corporations in Alaska," Raider was most enthusiastic when he spoke of the possibilities created on the village level by the new corporation.

"I have been reading in the press, and listening in on private conversations," said Raider, "... that Native corporations have a problem in coordinating profit-making activities ... while incorporating service to shareholders in the villages and creating entrepreneurial opportunities!"

This is not an easy task, Raider admitted, saying that when he traveled in rural Alaska, he recognized that it appeared that few business activities could be set up in the villages which would attract the "beautiful youngsters" home once they had received an education.

Raider also noted his observation that while people in urban Alaska own snowmachines and three-wheelers for pleasure, to have fun and fool around on, they are much more important in rural Alaska. "That is the automobile!" Raider stressed.

Trouble is, he said, by the time snowmachines are transported into the Bush, they are very, very expensive, Raider stressed. Prohibitively so for many people.

ICI has the answer for that, Raider said. Unassembled snowmachines and three-wheelers will be brought into the Bush by the new corporation. Entrepreneurial activity will be generated as shareholders are given the opportunity to set up shops in three villages, where warehouses will be set up, to assemble them.

Service shops will also be established by local people. Jobs will be created. This will help take shareholders "off the welfare rolls," said Raider, "giving them dignity in their own communities." Should individuals lack funding, CalVIC, a Calista subsidiary, will be able to help them.

Raider noted that all types of items, from clothing to household appliances, are tremendously expensive in the Bush. The reason, he said, is because they are bought on an individual basis, village by village. Calista International Corporation has plans to operate as a "feeder arm" not only for snowmachines and three-wheelers, but other goods as well. Items will be bought in large quantities and stored at a central warehouse in Seattle before being shipped into the Bush.

Buying and shipping in quantities, Raider said, will cut down on prices. He cautioned shareholders not to look for dramatic improvements immediately, but said that over a two to three-year period, substantial progress should be made.

Ultimately, said Raider, "the shareholders, who are so valuable to us, will enjoy a more stabilized ... life."

Raider further noted that within the Calista region there are about 1,250 fishermen, 600-700 furtrappers, and some 500-600 artists and crafts people producing "beautiful handiwork."

"They lack one entity to make them successful," Raider said, "- a marketplace!" Raider said that in visits to different villages he has seen what people from Outside come in and pay for ivory, furs and other items. "It is almost a protractment to steal!" he charged.

The buyers then resale the items, elsewhere at high profits, Raider said. Under CIC's plan, the corporation would serve as a market place for the villagers, getting fair prices for them, and marketing their work throughout the Pacific Rim.

After ten years of multi-million dollar losses, Calista made its first profit in 1982. Now, said Raider, it is the goal of the corporation to never fall back into a position of loss. To meet that goal, Calista is developing long range plans, such as those with CIC, to cover the next 10 to 20 years, Raider said.