

# North Pacific Rim to train paralegals in Chugach region

In an effort to bring legal assistance to the Native communities of Prince William Sound, The North Pacific Rim will sponsor a paralegal training program beginning in January, one of the few in Alaska.

According to Pat Kay, herself a paralegal, as well as a grants-writer for the Rim, the legal problems of Native people served by the tiny non-profit association differ greatly from town to town and person to person. Presently, individuals and some of the village corpora-

tions in the region rely on Kay for legal advice and research on problems that could easily be handled by paralegals.

"There are a lot of personal types of problems, such as divorce, what you're going to do with the kids, that sort of thing. Also juvenile problems. I've had calls and inquiries from people who feel they have been ripped off by their corporations or their boards. I've had a few of those stories where somebody was incarcerated for a long time for a very minor crime and just sat around waiting for somebody

to show up, like the traveling judges. I've had quite a number of consumer complaints."

Although Alaska Legal Services provides legal aid to rural communities through bush offices and traveling attorneys, that organization is frequently spread thin. The same is true of the Public Defender Agency. Trained paralegals are few and far between; most have received only on-the-job training, no extensive classroom instruction. In a phrase designed to end any argument about justifying a paralegal program, Kay says

bluntly:

"There has never been an attorney in Tatitlek, the need is obvious."

The only court facilities in the region are located in Valdez; there are magistrates in Cordova and Seward, all predominantly non-Native towns. If the gap in legal aid delivery is a problem within the region, it's worse between the region's tiny villages and Anchorage.

The Rim's \$229,834 paralegal program, made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, will begin in January when an attorney will come on board to develop the classroom material needed and get a feel for the legal needs of people in the region. One resident from each of the Rim communities, seven in all, will begin 10 months of legal classroom instruction in March in Anchorage.

Following their stint in class, paralegal trainees will be placed in a variety of jobs in the judicial system, still in Anchorage, where they will receive six months of on-the-job training. Throughout the training period, the students will be supported by the usual \$833 per month available to people holding positions funded by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act, in addition to \$250 per month for residential support.

Kay said plans are already in the making to place paralegal trainees in the state court system and attorney's offices.

In the grant application made to the Department of Labor, Kay outlined the problems of delivering legal services all over the state as a backdrop to explaining how the program would be carried out and what it expects to achieve:

"Seventy percent of Alaska Natives live in two hundred villages scattered over half a million square miles. Legal advice is delivered by a handful of attorneys employed by the Public Defender Agency and Alaska Legal Services. Because of the sparse population and low income of the inhabitants it is unlikely this will improve in the future."

Kay then sets forth the goals of the Rim's paralegal training program:

"An urgent need exists to provide trained and qualified paralegals to Alaska Natives. The project goal is to provide for that need by training 7 Native paralegals residing in each village within the Chugach Region. These paralegals will act as community counselors, in-

formal advocates, investigators, sympathetic listeners, negotiators, and educators of legal rights. The paralegals will enable the client communities to feel less in awe of the system and more competent to articulate grievances, to seek remedies, and to turn to appropriate authorities or professionals when needed.

"This program will support community economic development, strengthen the administrative capacities of governing bodies of Alaska Natives and their organizations, assist Alaska governing bodies and organizations to improve the effectiveness of services, and assist in the development of necessary social and economic infrastructure towards the goal of increased self-sufficiency.

"This program will minimize a most critical gap in the range of human development services for self-sufficiency in the villages."

Some of the courses to be offered to paralegal trainees include:

"Basic paralegal skill courses—legal research, law libraries, fact finding, interviewing, statements, evidence, public records, jury research, discovery depositions and interrogating, court observation, legal vocabulary. Some of these courses will be conducted at or in conjunction with the Criminal Justice Center which has already set up a paralegal training program in Bethel and Nome, through courtroom visits with the Alaska Court System, and through communication with the Alaska Legal Services who have trained paralegals working for them and training materials available.

"The law—what it is, its origin, traditional and current law, the legal system, types of law, civil and criminal law.

"Law and the family—property, marriage, juvenile matters, death, probate.

"Consumer Education—purchasing, contracts, liabilities, money management, credit.

"Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act—corporations, shareholders, land, easements, subsistence, regulations.

"Law and the Community—court/legal systems, law enforcement officers, individual rights, alcohol and the law.

"Local and state governments—municipal, state, IRA councils, regulatory agencies."

For more information about the Rim's paralegal training, readers may write The North Pacific Rim, 433 W. 9th, Suite 200, Anchorage, Alaska 99501.