

Native leader is 'real Eskimo'

The new president of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada describes himself as "Inummarrit". In English, it means a "real Eskimo". Michael Amarook explains that when he uses the expression, he is saying he has lived the Inuit way of life and understands what it is to be an Inuk.

Mr. Amarook, 35, was elected president of Inuit Tapirisat at the national organization's annual meeting in January at Fort Chimo, Que., succeeding James Arvaluk.

A native of Baker Lake in the Keewatin district of the Northwest Territories, Mr. Amarook was born March 26, 1941. At that time, the Inuit had not all been forced to move into the whiteman's settlements so as a result he grew up in the traditional Inuit way, living off the land as a hunter, fisherman and trapper.

He was married in 1959, and the same year moved to Baker Lake but did not abandon the Inuit way of life. He lived as a hunter from 1964 to 1969, and again from 1971 to 1974. In between, he worked at various jobs, as an interpreter and translator with the department of Indian and Northern affairs, in the Baker Lake crafts shop as director of printmaking, and

in 1971 and 1972 as manager of the local co-op. He joined the Inuit Tapirisat Land Claims Project as a field worker for the Keewatin region in 1974, and later became regional land claims officer. In 1975, he helped to organize the Keewatin Inuit Association, a regional affiliate of Inuit Tapirisat. He is also active in church work in Baker Lake.

For Michael Amarook, election to the presidency of Inuit Tapirisat amounts to a hardship assignment. As he told the conference delegates at Fort Chimo, his wife and nine children will feel homesick while living in Ottawa during his term of office.

However, he pledged himself to work for unity among Inuit across the Arctic. Now that Inuit Tapirisat had decided to set up an independent commission to deal with Land Claims in the Northwest Territories, he says, he wants the organization to become truly national, representing the interests of Inuit in Quebec and Labrador as well as in the N.W.T.

Mr. Amarook has little formal education himself, but he says one of his ambitions is to work for improvements in the school system in the North.