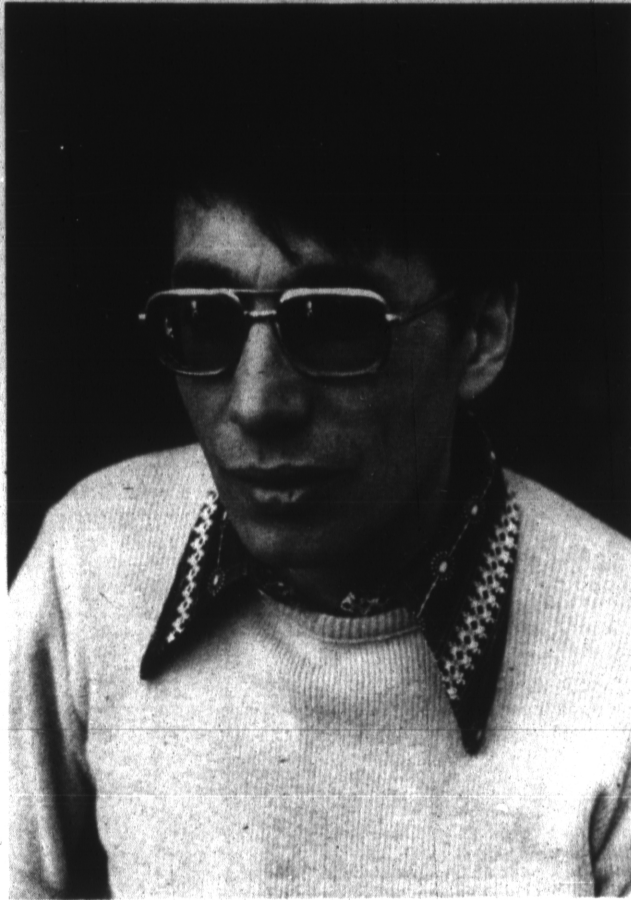


Kotzebue training program goes over well



Tony Schuerch, instructor for the University of Alaska Extension Center at Kotzebue very excited about the electrical apprenticeship program put on by IBEW at Kotzebue.

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By P.M. IVEY

According to Tony Schuerch, instructor with the Extension Center, University of Alaska at Kotzebue who was in Fairbanks last week, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1547 (IBEW) in Anchorage under the direction of Bud Garrison of Electrical Apprenticeship school has agreed to conduct an apprenticeship program at the University Extension Center in Kotzebue.

Schuerch stated that this was so that the Natives could learn in their own environment rather than be brought into urban areas for that purpose.

The electrical apprenticeship program in Kotzebue is already two weeks underway with Doug McLean at the helm, and according to Bud Garrison, "Doing great."

"Some time back, our people need some help in the housing area with plumbing, wiring, etc.," stated Schuerch.

"In our area the unions sent strangers in who made big money, got paid a lot of overtime, usually; came back with that money and spent it in Fairbanks or Anchorage.

"Since we have such a high rate of unemployment, this has been a bone in the throat of our people for many, many years. And, yet, when the unions said, 'well, send them down;

we'll run them through our

schools; they'll have to meet the qualifications like anybody else,' two things happened."

"One, our people generally were not ready to pass those exams; mostly the math. This is where they get shot down."

"Secondly, it never works when you take somebody from the village and send them in for vocational training in the big city. We get a 90% failure rate or some ridiculous figure like this."

"It's not our environment; we don't feel at home there. People get homesick. They fall into problems with alcohol, so, it just never works."

When asked if lack of security in the urban environment was the cause of failure in most cases, he said, "Yes. Just being far from home and not being used to this kind of society. A large urban area is not the place to train our people, especially for intensive vocational training."

"We just recently, for the first time, got the electrical union to consent to send an instructor to Kotzebue. ... they are finishing the second week of training for electrical apprenticeship. Ten men are in the program, mostly unemployed. I gave them a crash course in mathematics. They passed with flying colors and they're going full bore. These men are really serious, seeing that this is a first. It's an opportunity that they've never had before, to become electrical journeymen

eventually.

"The apprenticeship program calls for 12 weeks of training, at the end of which they can make \$11.00 per hour. They will get periodic raises until they reach journeyman level, which is about \$17.00 an hour."

"Now, the men in the electrical program are in a 12 week course, and they can only do the first six weeks in Kotzebue. The second six weeks will be in Anchorage. By then, they will have the background, and the association of the men they are in class with. They will be living in close proximity to one another. They'll just be continuing on. The reason that they have to go to Anchorage is that the equipment they need to finish their training is located in Anchorage.

When asked if there will be any more programs of this nature for the NANA region in the rest of the trades, Schuerch said, "I hope so. We're just getting the electrical one off the ground now, but we hope to go through all the vocational areas that we have a need for in the NANA region. We've set a precedent. All we have to do is follow it up and keep the snowball rolling.

"The electrical apprenticeship program is a 'first' for our people. It's exciting!" states Schuerch.