

Home for Christmas means much here

By BILL HESS

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People wish for many things at this time of year, but what Vera Moonin and her family want most for Christmas is to get out of the single room in which they have been living and into their new HUD home. It looks as if this Christmas wish is about to come true.

Moonin, whose house, except for the kitchen, was destroyed by fire, should soon be joining other Port Graham residents in moving into the 31 new two-, three- and four-bedroom homes recently constructed in the community. "I don't know if anyone can understand how happy I will be to move into my house," says Moonin.

After her old house burned several months ago, she and her children moved into the kitchen and have lived there since. Other members of the community have also been homeless since December of 1981 when they moved out of their homes and into those of relatives or friends to make room for the construction of their new homes.

Jeri Burke, housing manager for the North Pacific Rim, the non-profit arm of Chugach Natives, Inc., says the homes were

built with part of a \$5.4 million U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant. The new occupants will be buying the homes under HUD's Mutual Help program.

Along with the 31 units in Port Graham, 20 are going to English Bay, and 18 to Tatitlek. The average price of the homes is \$85,000, according to Burke.

The contract to build the homes was awarded to the R.S. Bower's Construction Company of Anchorage. Materials were barged in and were unloaded with a helicopter belonging to the Alaska Helicopter Company.

There is only one telephone in Port Graham, but the village has submitted 38 names to the Sitka Telephone company for future telephone installation.

"The new homes will add to the modern conveniences which we have, such as water, electricity, and a sewer system," says Walter Meganack, village council president. "Particularly seniors will enjoy

"No doubt, it is a big improvement for the village — not only will it beautify. The other side of the story is that new housing will increase outside influence. This means it will bring people back who have

left the village. They will bring a city-type life which they have inherited while they were living in the city.

"More people means more food, more hunting, woodcutting will increase, and more subsistence, that is the truth. It makes me happy that this is not a handout. Homebuyers will have something to show for their money. It's going to be their joy, and their pride in life."

Owning modern homes will create many changes in the lives of the villagers. New owners must learn about maintenance, fire safety and money management. The NPR housing authority will give ongoing workshops to assist the homebuyers in these areas.

For many, it will be the first time in their lives that they have been required to make monthly installments to maintain a home. Sergius Moonin, a community Elder, bought his first home in 1939 at an auction for \$1,600. He lived in that home for 40 years.

Moonin and his wife Luba made six advance monthly payments on their new home several months ago as they do not want to be bothered with the bills during the winter months. Much of the income in

Port Graham is seasonal, and other residents have also made advance payments.

If the residents of Port Graham have been excited over the prospect of moving into their new homes, they have also been frustrated by the delays which have prevented them from moving in earlier.

Last October, a signing ceremony conducted by Carol Green, then housing manager for NPR, was held in the community center. At the time, it was expected that the homes would be completed by Nov. 15, and that the families could move in shortly afterward.

When Thanksgiving approached, and the homeowners had not yet moved in, 18 of them sent a letter of complaint to Tom Kikta, who at the time was working as development coordinator at NPR.

The letter writers complained to Kikta that they had expected to move into their homes by Thanksgiving. They charged that because a housing inspection scheduled before the holiday was cancelled because "you all don't want it to interfere with your Thanksgiving holiday. Have you ever considered our Thanksgiving? . . . We are very tired of having our expectations raised only to be

disappointed once again . . . As you are sitting down enjoying your Thanksgiving feast, please remember us here in Port Graham. Happy Thanksgiving!"

Burke says that while it had been expected that homes could be occupied by that time, problems in construction made it impossible.

She and others traveled to Port Graham the week after Thanksgiving, and found deficiencies in the homes which needed to be righted before anyone could move in. "The housing authority could not accept houses that were not at a quality level," she explains.

Burke traveled once again to Port Graham on Dec. 10 and 11 to conduct an inspection of 20 of the homes. If no problems were found, the owners can move in immediately, she says.

"The people are very anxious to move in before the Russian Christmas," Burke notes. The first 20 homeowners to have their houses completed and inspected were chosen on a priority basis according to need.



Sergius and Luba Moonin (middle) stand outside their new HUD home in Port Graham. With them are their sons, Richard (left) and Wallace.



Vera Moonin's HUD home will replace this one-room kitchen she has been living in with her four children since her house burned down several months ago.

PHOTOS BY JAN APHELIN