

# **Mayor Tagarook's Huge Mail Package**

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**BARTER ISLAND** — The biggest single piece of mail Gregg Tagarook of Kaktovik is likely to get in his entire lifetime arrived last week after a slight delay due to fog over the coastline of north Alaska.

The airmail "package" contained Kaktovik's brand new modular post office, complete and ready for instant on-the-site installation. The carrier was an enormous Hercules cargo plane, loaded to the gills in Fairbanks with only inches of clearance.

The building bore a giant letter addressed to Mayor Tagarook, complete with zip code — 99747, in case anyone else is thinking of mailing a building or two to Kaktovik.

The letter from E. T. Klassen, Postmaster General of the United States, reads: "It is a great pleasure to address to you this United States Post Office, symbolizing our dedication to

service to the people of Kaktovik and the nation. This is the first of ten new post offices being installed in the more remote Alaskan villages this summer. May it serve well."

The other communities scheduled  
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duled to receive identical units are Gambell, Savoonga, Talkeetna, Togiak, Naknek, Egegik, Unalaska, Angoon, and Kake.

Kaktovik's post office will be the only one shipped by mail. Installation on all ten is expected to be completed by the end of October. Sites for most of the units have been donated by village councils and the Bureau of Land Management.

The modular buildings are built in two parts, each 9' by 46' to provide nearly 850 square feet of floor space when put together on the site. The contractor was ATCO STRUCTURES, Inc. of Anchorage, but the units were actually built in the lower '48.

Total cost for the project was around \$400,000, or about \$40,000 per unit. According to post office studies, it was more economical to have the post offices built at one location where skilled construction workers and materials are available and "quality can be controlled."

"Then we ship the finished product to the site rather than import all the materials and skilled men and attempt to do the job in a remote area."

The units have turquoise blue metal sliding and metal roofs. The interior is predominantly

hardwood wall paneling. Heating units, hot water heater, chemical toilets, customer counter, postal equipment, and even a flagpole are installed before transportation to the site.

To the untrained eye, the new post offices look very much like a modern trailer house with a \$40,000 price tag, but reporters were assured that rigid weather conditions had been met in very high quality standards.

One community scheduled to receive one of the new units complained about the esthetics of the building, calling it "two flat tin cans stuck together."

The post office said no community has to accept the buildings if they don't want them. "We have more than enough standing in line, waiting for them," said an official.

The project has also received criticism for the out-of-state construction. "Had the units been constructed locally," said the complainant, "jobs would have been created for Alaskans."

Admittedly something like an emergency situation exists in upgrading mail service to rural Alaska. Nevertheless, Native villages may want to take another look at design before the next ten buildings go into production.