

UTA opens new office

by Polly E. Hyslop

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United Tribes of Alaska now has an office located in Anchorage on 429 "D" Street, Suite 214. Donated to them is an Alaska Native Resource Library that contains over 5,000 volumes of material donated to them.

Established two years ago, UTA was created out of a need for village traditional governments to have a voice representing them politically since ANC-SA did not include tribal governments established long before state or federal laws were formed in Alaska.

"We're recognizing our special relationship with the governments written in the law...There are fundamental rights as indigineous communities and it's time we exercised the powers for legislative and local control," said Leonard Menka, public relations and membership coordinator.

"Our vocabulary doesn't include "Statewide" anymore because we're talking about the traditional governments that existed long before the state, the territory, and the federal governments," said Jim Sennett, Tribal Planner and Program Director. He said ANC-SA has shortcomings that jeopardize the livelihood of the villages.

"The original intent of ANC-SA was to give the people their lands back - that's not the case," he said.

"Over half of the village corporations are in dire financial straits...by the very structure of ANC-SA we have put in jeopardy the land base of the Native people to be used as collateral." UTA will step in and represent the village governments where they feel AFN has not done.

"AFN represents corporations, not the tribal communities and their governments. We're critical of reference to AFN as the sole spokesman for Alaska Native people," he added.

Operating without pay, the office has five full-time volunteers. "We live off of food-stamps or unemployment...we're all broke," said Bennett.

One volunteer, John Tetpon, marketing man for UTA, said if he didn't believe in the purpose of UTA he wouldn't be there. To him UTA is to legitimately unify all the people in the villages of Alaska.

One of the primary purposes in opening and an Anchorage base office is to prepare for the second annual Congress for the UTA, a cultural and political event in September 15-21 at the Egan Center. They expect around 1,000 delegates from the 210 tribal governments around Alaska.

"The Congress will meet to consider and pass legislation that impact all the village and tribal governments throughout Alaska," said Sennett.