

# AFN's History recounted: 1966-1986

On the 99th anniversary of the purchase of Alaska from Russia, 17 Native organizations gathered for a three-day conference to address the issue of Alaska Native aboriginal land rights.

This historic conference, in October of 1966, established the first statewide Native organization presenting a unified position on Native land use and occupancy. The name of the new organization was the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN).

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Alaska Federation Of Natives. For 20 years AFN has been an effective advocate for Alaska Natives on issues ranging from social service needs to the passage and implementation of ANCSA.

The theme of this year's annual convention - "20 years of Integrity, Pride in Heritage, and Progress" - was chosen in recognition of AFN's contribution in accomplishing those goals.

The Alaska Statehood Act of 1958 recognized Native use and occupancy of Alaska's 375 million acres of land, but it failed to provide for the protection of Native land rights. The Statehood Act authorized the state to select and receive more than 100 million acres of land from the public domain.

State selection of lands used and occupied by Natives forced Alaska Natives to organize on a regional basis in an effort to protect their aboriginal rights.

Some groups were formed primarily to deal with land claims, while others had been in existence for years, promoting the social and economic well-being of their members. In 1966, these groups formed the AFN.

The AFN constitution adopted at that time established a base of operations funded by dues from member groups. That funding mechanism is still in effect.

Throughout congressional consideration of the Native claims issue, AFN had a commanding voice in the negotiations which led to passage of ANSCA.

During those early days, AFN also managed a number of statewide human services programs and pro-

vided technical assistance to native associations. As the strength and independence of the associations grew, AFN human services programs were transferred to the AFN regional associations.

Today, the AFN Board of Directors consists of representatives of both regional corporations established by ANSCA and non-profit associations. The full Board, composed of the land Claims Board and the Human Resources Board, sets the direction and policy of AFN. This year, the delegates to the convention will decide whether the Interim Village Board, created last year to give the villages a larger voice in AFN affairs, will become part of the full Board.