

NANA Attorney Talks on Native Land Claims

By MARGE BAUMAN

KOTZEBUE — "Down in the Lower 48 the Indians are a defeated, beaten race," said attorney Richard Baenen. They have lost hope. They don't smile.

"You people have a vitality, a lust for life that they don't have, because you still have your land."

Baenen paused for a moment and the village corporation leaders of Northwest Alaska began applauding their attorney from Washington, D.C., for he had touched simply on what the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is all about.

The key issue, of course, was the land — the need to choose wisely in selecting over two million acres under the settlement act — and the need to protect the land reclaimed.

"Protect your land," warned Baenen. "The land you secured under the settlement act must be protected at all costs. When the money is gone, the land will go too, because you won't have the money to pay taxes.

"By investing prudently you will start to receive dividends, interest earned on your capital, and you will still have that capital. You will have a chance to

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pass it on to your children. God help you if you can't," he said.

"Down in the Lower 48, the Indians can't hunt, can't fish. They've lost their land base. You have to be strong enough to resist pleas for big dividends when you get them. You have to build a strong, viable organization with a solid land base," he said.

Cooperation in land selection is extremely important," said NANA executive director John W. Schaeffer. "We've sold all but 40 million acres of Alaska.

"Some people will say we don't own the land, but Congress said we did, so don't worry about that," Schaeffer said.

"Who owns the land? You all own the land, through the cor-

porations.

"Remember that the land goes to the village corporations, not the people, so you have to make the choice," Schaeffer told

village directors from Noorvik, Noatak, Selawik, Kotzebue, Buckland, Ambler, Shungnak, Deering, Kiana, Kivalina and Kobuk.