

Bethel Fire Destroys Main Store in Area

The recent million dollar Bethel fire on July 2 which completely destroyed the Swanson Brothers General Store, ten apartments above the store and three warehouses has created serious problems for this lower Kuskokwim city of 1,700, according to the Bethel City News in a special edition.

Of immediate concern is the loss of housing. In September, Bethel expects an influx of 40 school teachers who must all be housed in the city. Swanson's usually housed from 6 to 8 teachers in the apartments over the now burned store.

The city was concerned about the housing situation even before the fire, but is now seeking assistance from the Governor's Office as less than half of the teachers are now housed.

The summer's first supply vessel had just unloaded merchandise at Bethel and the warehouses were stocked with food and dry goods, as well as materials such as ammunition, oil and paint.

While it is felt by city administrators that the shortage felt by Bethel and approximately 20 surrounding villages served by Swanson's will be taken care of by other stores, the economic consequences of the fire will not be minimal.

Mike Rowan, city administrator, reported that all the records of Authentic Eskimo Arts and Crafts, Inc. have been lost in the fire. The AEA&C, Inc. is a non-profit shop begun last November and is operated by Mike Rowan and his wife Irene.

Arts and crafts were collected from about 20 villages and sold in shops in Bethel and out of town. With the accession books and lists

of the different craftsmen gone, the store is unable to recognize ownership of the various items.

Mike Rowan requests that the village craftsmen wait until he can sort out all the merchandise, which should be within a month, and that then some sort of arrangement will be made with the Village Councils and with individual people who have claims. He feels that the craft shop will be back in business within the month.

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