



**NATIVE WOMEN GATHER**— Annie Bowen (left in light dress), Denise Bousley (foreground), next to Tiny Phillips, and other women listen intently during one of the general meetings held during the three-day Alaska Native Women's Convention held at Alaska Pacific University May 10 through May 12. (Photo by Lucy Albeit)

# Native women voice goals and concerns

by Diane F. Benson

"Alaska Native leadership did not emerge with the land claims effort", stated Rosita Worl. "Many of us are aware of Native women who were legitimate leaders who maintained close contact and communication with us, who advocated for our interests, who lived among us, and, most of all, who cared for and loved us."

Rosita and many other Native leaders and carriers of Alaska Native tradition gathered together for the first Alaska Native Women's Statewide Convention last week, May 10-12, in Anchorage. All of Alaska's regions were there to determine common goals and concerns and ways to voice them collectively.

Workshops at the Convention mainly covered social and Health, business and political issues. However, the overall concern that was continually expressed by the conventioners centered on subsistence. Most stated that not only was it important that they be heard and have input on subsistence issues, but also prepared many recommendations for the convention to act upon.

Annie Bowen, speaking for the Arctic Slope Region, said that they would be writing to President Jimmy Carter on the Beaufort Sea sales and that the "Barrow Mothers" organization would begin acting

on this. "Where is it all going to stop?" she asked. Seismographic testing disrupts the hunting for foxes, walrus, everything."

To insure the voice of women participating in subsistence issues would be heard, Daisy Mae Lamont, from Bethel, presented recommendations from the "Women's Role in Subsistence" workshop. Some of these were:

1) Educational curriculum should include the importance of Native women in subsistence cultures;

2) AFN and RuralCAP strive to insure that all regions are included in subsistence affairs;

3) AFN should also recommend Native women representatives of all regions to fish and game boards and other state and federal boards and commissions.

In addition, the group (see GOALS page three)



**Rosita Worl**

# ● Native women voice goals

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wished the convention to:

1) Draft a rebuttal letter to the Alaskan Sportsman Association concerning the negative and derogatory supplement that appeared in the Anchorage daily newspapers on Natives and subsistence users.

2) Support Native women in appointment or hiring to resource offices, fish and game boards, and regional advisory boards.

The women in attendance were strongly aware of their role and importance in subsistence.

"Within our traditional cultures, Native women maintain a significant role in the economic system... She is a valuable, necessary, contributing member of the society," said Mrs. Worl. "Many early historical accounts of explorers note the commanding position of Native women in different societies. I do not mean to paint a picture of utopia, but I submit that her contributions certainly must affect her feelings of self-worth. Viewed from this perspective," she continued, "it is understandable that Native women should take a leading interest in the maintenance of sub-

sistence cultures."

She added, "I would caution Alaska Native women that subsistence is potentially threatened even from within our own societies. We must carefully scrutinize and evaluate our corporations to insure that their activities do not pose any conflicts for our subsistence cultures."

Participants in the "Women in Management" workshop and other delegates, doubted the intentions of many of their male coun-

terparts and their regional corporations in encouraging women leadership. Of the 30 workshop participants, only nine actually worked in management, but many desired or planned to. Two of their recommendations were to: 1) have the convention or a committee set a goal for each corporation based on the total number of employees and women and come up with a percentage of employable women that should be in (See GOALS page four)

# ● Goals, concerns listed

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management positions, encourage upward mobility, and insure follow up and 2) that the convention look into the possibilities for funding of business and board seminars for women.

"We as Native women want no more road blocks and no more obstacles thrown in our way than the average Native man has to surmount in his climb upward," said Sandra Borbridge. "We do want equal job options and opportunities, and we do want equal pay for equal work." The majority of the regions represented at the convention expressed the need for more women on regional

boards and management positions.

The convention brought a variety of women from all parts of the state. Many did not know what to expect at first, but later found themselves sharing even the most personal tales of discriminatory and belittling incidents with other women. This brought realization that there was more than just a need to advance their roles or careers, or to get rid of the load carried from other stereotypes.

"We suffer a lot of discrimination because of being alone and having children," said one single parent. "Try to get ser-

vices, and sometimes they think, something in return.. they think you're promiscuous."

"Any of you ever beat up?" cried one young woman. "See your children or your mother beat up? Why do we have this problem?"

The concerns of women numbered heavily. Workshops were held on not only "Single Parents", and "Violence Against Native Women", but also on,

1) Working mothers,

2) suicide rates and why,

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# Native women convene—list priorities

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3)alcoholism in Native women and treatment facilities,

4)transitional problems, rural to urban and urban to rural, and several others. Recommendations were made by nearly every region to have centers for women to go to in the villages. There were several complaints about the lack of services and women and youth programs in the rural areas.

Despite the sensitivity of some issues, the women found times to laugh about some things, as did one story about transition.

"One woman, when she first moved to the city, had her groceries delivered. One time she received the wrong groceries and so she kept them, to be returned. She noticed, when she looked in the bag, a round green thing and got curious, so she cut it open to see what was inside. She saw nothing, figured it was no good, threw it away. It was a green pepper!"

Sohio BP, Alaska-USA, and other non-Native companies allowed or even encouraged Native women employed by them to take time off to attend the convention. It was found that several Native organizations had not, and as a result some groups were not very well represented. There were many Native organizations that did support the convention however and had sent representatives. One employee of the BIA, in order to attend, used her annual leave to do volunteer work for three days at the convention.

More representation was anticipated than observed from the Anchorage community due to the location of the convention. Some delegates suspected that a significant number of men may view a womens convention as nothing more than a social gathering or even a feminist movement of some kind.

"Many men are thinking 'ah-ha'. They are all getting together and finding ways to work against us!" said Esther Koloa. "Actually we are trying to find ways to work with them."

"We need to change," said another delegate, "because we want to be involved and be heard, our own men accuse us trying to destroy the culture, but it is not that way."

"We have to get across collectively to men that they are an obstacle [due to these attitudes], said Sandra Borbridge.

Unlike many meetings or

conventions one may witness now days, the Alaska Native Women's Statewide Convention maintained a strong cultural influence throughout the three days. Songs were song in their Native dialect and poems were read.

The conference began with six women sharing stories which related a small part of their culture, each in their own dialect. Della Keats, an Inupiat doctor, spoke on modern and traditional medicines. Each speaker had an interpreter.

Another distinction was the arrangement of a non-delegate workshop for those who were either non-Native women and interested men. Together they talked in their group about the differences they saw between Native and non-Native women and the role they saw themselves in at the

convention. The group had a little difficulty at first in adjusting to the idea of being a separate unit from the rest due to the fact they were not Native women.

In coming to a conclusion on their status, one woman said, "I think this is comparable with some of our own women meeting together in the past, where we met because of the need to separate from the men and not be intimidated by them. Native women, too want to convene alone."

Another woman added. "I feel good we were even allowed to come. Native women here have been incredibly polite."

The convention verified that Alaska Native women, as a whole, have unique and similar problems and obstacles to overcome. The

convention also proved the need and desire for a statewide women's organization. Many delegates were volunteers at the convention and, like the leaders who initiated the organizing of the Alaska Federation of Natives in 1967 came without attache' cases and per diem checks.

These individuals who came together at this historical moment did so because of the evident need to be one strong voice to speak in behalf of issues that affect them as women and Native people. Said Lisa Dolchok, "How do we change things? Maybe it is coming together and sharing and hearing it from each other."

This is only the beginning as there are plans for meetings and conventions in the future, to carry out the recommendations. As

Georgianna Lincoln maintained on the final day of the convention, "This is an ongoing organization, and we're going to continue functioning after today!"

There is little doubt as to the positive impact the meetings have had on the 200 and some delegates, and just what it meant when Anna Frank from Minto said, "Stand together!"

In attendance were many Native womens groups which are not always recongnized. These were the "Barrow Mothers" organization, members of "Lioness" chapters, Bering Straits Womens organization", Alaska Native Sisterhood, and others. Also present were Diane Carpenter, Betsy Titus, and Rosita Worl, delegates to the International Women's Convention held in Houston, Texas last year.