



*Vyacheslav Kobets, left, governor of the Magadan Territory in the Soviet Far East, greets Gov. Steve Cowper, with the assistance of Anchorage interpreter John Tichotsky at the Anchorage International Airport Feb. 20.*

# Alaskans host Soviet visitors

by Alexandra McClanahan  
and Holly F. Reimer  
Tundra Times writers

When the Soviet Aeroflot plane touched down at Anchorage International Airport Feb. 20, more than 90 people from throughout the Soviet Far East and Moscow began an unprecedented week-long visit to Alaska.

"Through the joint efforts of private people and government, we have been able to take steps to melt the ice curtain which has existed between Alaska and the Soviet Union since 1948," Cowper said.

The Soviets were brought to Alaska as a result of efforts by Dixie Belcher

of Juneau and the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce. Belcher is the executive director of Camai, a group of performing artists.

Among the Soviet performing artists in Alaska were Stas Namin and Rondo, two of the top rock groups in the

(Continued on Page Thirteen)

## Souvenirs for sale

—Page Four

Rock musicians, folk singers and dancers, Native people, government officials and journalists were welcomed to Anchorage by Congressman Don Young, R-Alaska, Gov. Steve Cowper, Anchorage Mayor Tom Fink and other officials. The Alaskans said they hope the Soviets' trip is just the beginning of more ties between the two nations.

# • Visit to Alaska

(Continued from Page One)

USSR.

Vyacheslav Kobets, governor of Magadan in the Soviet Far East, spoke through an interpreter at the airport and extended his greetings, saying he was "ecstatic" to be in Alaska.

"Our hearts are in your hands," he said.

As a result of an agreement signed last fall by Cowper and Kobets, Alaska and Magadan became sister states.

There was the Gala Welcoming Reception that evening at the Anchorage Center for the Performing Arts, it was the official welcoming to all the Soviets from people in Anchorage and all over Alaska.

The Soviets' flight to Alaska is being called the return Friendship Flight. But the welcome was more than just friendship. Families were reunited after a generation of wondering if it would be possible to meet again.

But for friends who had met in Provideniya last June for the first time it was also a special welcome to be able to meet again.

In Cowper's closing remarks he said there is no such thing as too much peace and people from the Soviet Union and Alaska will meet again and again.

Although everybody could not communicate verbally, people were still exchanging handshakes, smiles and even trading pins.

A small group of government officials flew to Juneau at mid-week to tour the capital, and many of the Soviets went to various schools throughout the Anchorage School District. They also participated in business meetings and toured various parts of Southcentral Alaska.