

# Alaskans go on \$100,000 spending spree

by **Steve Pilkington**

**Tundra Times reporter**

At the end of the first day, the Soviet-Alaskan trade fair held in Anchorage last week had sold more than \$100,000 in merchandise from the Soviet Far East, organizers said.

And Alaska State Chamber of Commerce officials still had one more day to sell the remaining goods before calling it quits.

But importing the Soviet clothing, souvenirs and furs and selling them during the two-day shopping spree was not as easy as it looked.

After the 12,000 pounds of merchandise from the Soviet Far East cleared the U.S. Customs Service, Alaskans had a unique chance to grab

up exotic souvenirs while injecting hard currency into the Soviet economy.

A 90-member Soviet delegation brought the trade goods to sell during a week of business and trade discussions arranged by the State Chamber of Commerce.

The shopping fair was at the William A. Egan Civic & Convention Center. But organizers said it almost didn't come off.

When the goods arrived at the airport, Bill Bredesen, who was in charge of getting the merchandise from the airport to the Egan Center, said the job looked impossible.

"I had a heart attack when I saw the stuff come off the cargo line,"

Bredesen said.

The biggest problem, however, was that Soviet furs and carved ivory were included in the shipment.

The Customs Service embargoed the Soviet ivory and required payment of duties on the remaining goods. Some tariffs are as high as 90 percent of the value of the item.

Perry Eaton, chief executive officer of the Community Enterprise Development Corp., said the reason for the customs problem was that the United States does not favor trade with the Soviets.

"What we need to do is get them a favored nation status," Eaton said. This would avoid heavy tariffs which the state chamber had to pay to clear

the merchandise through customs, he said.

"If there is any trade, it should be at face value," he said.

But after long hours of work, customs officials unexpectedly cleared items like furs and fur hats, according to organizer Bredesen.

Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, any ivory harvested after 1972 cannot be imported into America.

As a result, the customs service had an overtime inspector who worked till 1 in the morning to help get the goods cleared, Bredesen said.

The state chamber posted a bond, estimated to be \$100,000, to clear the

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embargoed goods from customs.

"The customs service and the Fish and Wildlife Service are to be commended for their flexibility," said Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska.

Because of the cooperation, items like polar fox pelts, aprons, tablecloths and utensils were poked, touched and purchased by shoppers from all around Alaska.

"I just want something small and simple so I can say I have something from Russia," said Michael Pederson of Anchorage who was at the fair. Pederson's sister from Barrow, Laura Patkotak, said she was eyeing a \$50 shawl.

The trade fair, organized by David Cannon and the state chamber, was a sort of trial run to find out how trade between Alaska and the Soviet Union would fare.

"We've sold over \$100,000 worth," Cannon said after the first day.

Cannon said the Soviets simply turned the event over to the Alaskans to organize. And, he said, it turned out very well.

While Soviet and Alaskan businessmen talked of ways to boost international trade, shoppers filed through the convention center.

One Soviet delegate, during a seminar focusing on trade ventures last week, said there are new possibilities.

Valerii C. Lozovoi, head of the Association for Economic Cooperation, said the Soviet Union is looking for ways in which American joint ventures in his country could profit.

In spite of the difficulties, many shoppers simply enjoyed knowing that the merchandise was rare.