

Breaking the Ice links Alaska with Soviet Union

by Linda A. Chamberlain

for the Tundra Times

Sixty Alaskans who have been instrumental in the success of the Alaska Siberia Medical Research Program attended a premier showing of the new film, *Breaking the Ice: The Alaska Siberia Medical Research Program* May 17 at the University of Alaska-Anchorage.

The 30-minute film, which was produced by Douglas Barry and directed by Edward Guiragos, will be released in the next few weeks by the BBC across Europe. The film will return to Alaska to be shown in the state at a later date.

The gala event May 17 began with an introduction by Dr. Ted Mala who has pioneered this historical agreement between the University of Alaska and Siberia.

Mala, who is part Eskimo and part Russian, has devoted the past five years of his life to developing this scientific medical exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union.

A dream became reality when this proposal became part of the Geneva Summit. The agreement was formally signed in Washington, D.C., in July 1986 after extensive negotiations.

Breaking the Ice takes the audience on a mental journey from the shores

of Little Diomedé across the ocean to the interior of Siberia.

The viewer is given an insider's view of medical facilities in the Soviet Union and research on health problems relative to northern populations. Many scenes were taken from slides by Mala from his recent tour of Siberia.

Similarities between Siberia and Alaska are presented, as well as the mutual benefit to both countries of this exchange of medical information. Specific problems affecting both countries' populations, such as cold hysteria, seasonal depression and alcoholism, are discussed by physicians and health care aides.

The film emphasizes the strong links between Alaska and Russia. Two nations — once connected by a land bridge and now separated by a meager three miles in distance, but infinitely different in government and politics — have a great deal to share.

Breaking the Ice is the beginning of an extraordinary cooperative effort of people in the private sector to work together.

Dessert and coffee followed the screening in celebration of the film and as a "bon voyage" to Mala, who departed for Moscow Thursday. Mala will stop in London to meet with the BBC and then continue on to the



Sixty Alaskans gathered for the premier of the new film, including Dr. Ted Mala, center, who pioneered the historical pact. photo by Linda A. Chamberlain

Soviet Union.

He will accompany the Russian delegation to Umea, Sweden, where they will attend the Seventh International Circumpolar Conference in June.

Following the conference, Mala will travel to Paris, and then to Geneva, where he will meet with the World Health Organization, to discuss the Alaska Siberia Medical Research Program.

Alaska had made history with this

unprecedented agreement. The exchange of medical information between the University of Alaska and Siberia will lead to the betterment of the quality of life for Alaskans and save lives as we learn more about the unique problems of living in the North and how to cope with them.

Those who would like more information about the film may contact Mary Core at the University of Alaska-Anchorage, 786-4746.