

CITC focuses on jobs, education

By Linda Lord-Jenkins

Tundra Times

Educational scholarships and employment opportunities will be the main thrust of the Cook Inlet Tribal Council which was formed to serve Cook Inlet Regional Inc., shareholders this summer.

CITC has become the official non-profit arm of CIRI which is the officially designated tribal organization for CIRI. Until this summer, the Cook Inlet Native Association, one of the oldest Native organizations in the state, had served CIRI shareholders with social service, health and educational opportunities.

However, at the June CIRI annual meeting, shareholders told their board of directors that they felt they weren't getting all the job and educational opportunities they wanted and needed, according to Esther Combs, a former CINA deputy director and current CITC executive director.

"They felt that CIRI has a lot of contact with employers in the area such as oil companies and we wanted to get more shareholder employment.

CITC has established an employment bank for CIRI shareholders but Combs said that non-shareholders also will be invited to use the bank in the future.

She said CITC also is exploring the possibility of contracting with other Native regional

profit and non-profit corporations to handle their employment needs. Some of the other corporations such as Calista and Sealaska have very active and aggressive employment banks, she said, but others do not and need such a thing.

The educational arm of CIRI and CITC is the CIRI foundation which makes scholarship grants to shareholder and non-shareholder alike, said Combs, who added that more scholarships will be granted next year.

CITC was opened at the behest of CIRI shareholders but will serve shareholders, plus their spouses, children and biological and adopted children.

CIRI has 6,264 members who are automatically CITC members plus about 1,200 lineal descendants who are eligible.

CITC also has just received the contract to conduct a health needs assessment among CIRI shareholders in the Cook Inlet area and has subcontracted the research aspect to Richard Wells. CITC will provide guidance to Wells, she said.

The \$50,000 contract was granted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Combs said that CITC has decided to seek other BIA grants and contracts for programs, but not immediately.

The bulk of local BIA contracts are being handled by

CINA this year and much of that will not change, she said.

"I want to dispel some misperceptions people have about us and CINA. We are not here to take over from CINA. We are not in competition with CINA. They have programs we could not hope to operate . . . they have the systems and we would not want to set them up.

"There are enough needs of Alaska Natives in the area that we don't need to get into a controversy about who does what," said Combs.

CINA handles programs such as AS THE Indian Child Welfare Act program which Combs said

exemplifies the type of program that CITC won't become involved in.

CITC has been working with BIA to discuss education grant contracts and other money programs, she said.

In the meantime, CITC is operating on money granted from CIRI which contributed \$200,000 for the first three years of operation and \$150,000 for the two years thereafter.

The relatively small amount of money warrants a compact organization and CITC is just that with only five employees at this time. It requires the

staff to handle many different jobs and has required Combs to become active in the group's Bingo operation at Arctic Boulevard.

Bingo was a subject Combs was aware of while working at CINA. The CINA Bingo Hall brings in enough money to pay for CINA's scholarship program and the annual meeting.

But, Combs said, as CITC executive director she has had to become involved in all minor aspects of Bingo from 'soup to nuts.'

"I thought we'd just get
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a hall, some tables and a snack bar and that'd be it. But running a Bingo operation is a real art," she says.

Although a management company has been hired to run the Bingo hall, competition on the Anchorage Bingo market is keen and constant marketing changes are made to attract players, she says.

So far, it is going well, she said.

Robert Rude, former president of CINA, is the president for CITC. Four CITC board members also serve on the CINA board and at least three CITC board members are also CIRI board members.

The CITC board was appointed by the CIRI board, not elected as at CINA.

Roy Huhndorf is vice-president of CITC. Other officers and board members are: A. Debbie Fullenwider, secretary; Ileen Sylvester, treasurer; Gerald Gularte, CITC chairman, and directors, John Evans, Max Dolchok, Pauline Hooten, Seraphim Stephan, Tyonek,; Lillian Lapp, Anchorage, and Larry Matson, Anchorage.