



AREA DIRECTOR—The newly installed Bureau of Indian Affairs area director for Alaska, Morris Thompson, is enjoying the Fairbanks Native Association potlatch last Saturday. Sitting with

him is his wife Thelma. On the far right is the friend of the Tundra Times Ernie Hanauer of Fairbanks.

—MADELYN SHULMAN Photograph

'Leadership Expanding'—

BIA Area Director Thompson

"Native leadership is expanding rapidly," commented BIA Alaska Area Director Morris Thompson. He cited the sophisticated native organizations controlling thousands and millions of dollars in assets, natives in government positions all over Alaska and in Washington, D.C.

Thompson, himself, an Athabascan Indian from Tanana, is a sign of this expansion—as Area Director of the mammoth Alaskan Bureau of Indian Affairs operations.

In his first month as Area Director, Thompson has logged thousands of miles to meet with dozens of BIA staff members and native leaders in all parts of Alaska.

Communications—opening the communications between native leaders and the BIA hierarchy—is his first order of business in his new job and he is accomplishing it through meetings with AFN directors, regional native boards, and local native associations in many parts of Alaska.

"We're trying to open communications between the BIA and the native people—to develop a sense of teamwork," Thompson told the Tundra Times during a trip to Fairbanks.

Once communications are established, he hopes to use native ideas to adapt Bureau programs to fit the needs of native communities.

Termination is a big question today. In Congress, several bills call for a cutback or termination of BIA services along with any land claims settlement.

Yet, in his talks with native leaders, Thompson has received opinions which favor a change in the BIA, an adaption to the needs of native people today, but not an end to the Bureau's services.

The BIA is changing and will change more, to respond to Native needs and desires, according to Thompson. At present, under the BIA rotation policy, Alaskan Field Administrators have been informed of pending reassignment. So far, few have been

notified of reassignments, though a committee in Washington is working to find new slots for former Superintendents.

In Fairbanks, the local Field Administrator has requested a change.

In Juneau, the Tlingit-Haida have contracted to take over the southeast BIA superintendency. Next month, they will name an individual as acting Field Administrator.

On July 1, after two or three months supervising the day to day BIA operation, the Area Director and acting Field Administrator will report to the Tlingit-Haida Central Council.

If their contract with the BIA seems to work, they will assume responsibility for the Southeast field office.

In his meetings with field administrators, BIA staff, and native organizations, Thompson has tried to encourage open dialogue on the bureau programs, recent changes and the needs and desires of native groups.

"Also, I've been renewing old acquaintances," said the Area Director.

After his weeks on the road, the Area Director will return to his Juneau offices to settle into

the routine of BIA business. For the indefinite future, the BIA offices will remain in Juneau, despite an announced move to Anchorage.

Yet, last weekend, Morris Thompson was "home," attending the FNA potlatch, the dog races and visiting with his family—who have remained in Fairbanks and Tanana to see friends and family until they can find a house in Juneau.

On his trip, he met with the Fairbanks Native Association board and with the Native Advisory Board for the Fairbanks Field Office, a group with many good ideas based upon their past months of overseeing BIA operations in the area.