

# Village Housing

(Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from a speech made by Wendell P. Kay, Anchorage Attorney and former Executive Director of the Alaska Housing Authority, delivered before the Federal Housing Authority Seminar at Anchorage.)

Now, I would like to tell you that the market which isn't being reached by FHA is a good market. That it can be a rich market. That it can form the base of your future fortune and pay dividends through all your years. If you will cultivate it and aid it to grow.

We have no need to discuss Appalachia. Here in Alaska we have more than forty thousand people who would regard Appalachia with envy and another ten to twenty thousand who would regard the people of Appalachia as co-habitants of an equal plane. These sixty thousand people have need for some fifteen thousand homes . . . right now . . . and there is little chance that they will be built now—or tomorrow.

I have no way of knowing how many of you people have ever traveled through the villages which dot the rivers of Alaska. Let me give you an eagle's eye view.

Folks, the conditions which exist within many villages of Alaska—and especially in the matter of housing—challenge belief. More than two hundred villages have housing that defies description. Indoor plumbing, is a honey bucket that can be dumped in the river, plus a pail to be placed by the sink to melt ice for water. As many as seventeen people share a shack that not only defies housing standards, but also defies gravity by continuing to stand at all.

The situation is unique in the United States. These Alaskans, largely Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut, are people who have passed out of their own civilization and are struggling to enter another. In the transition stage they have substandard educations, substandard housing, substandard food. Only their inherent intelligence, good nature and basic abilities offers assurance for the future.

Obviously, housing is but one of their substandard items. Their villages are replete with nothing! No electricity, no running water, no sewers, no streets, no sidewalks, and normally no economy.

Today, they haven't so much as a dream of FHA and it isn't because they are unacquainted with government. They know well about the BIA and the ESC and several other agencies including the ADC—the aid to dependent children. However, to them, the FHA is on a par with the Mariner's trip to Mars. It's just a bit out of their world.

All America has heard and knows the story of people who have worked their way up from the bottom, but in this case, these people have to reach up to touch bottom.

At this time, Senator Bartlett has requested the Public Housing Administration to include a special program for these people in the Housing Omnibus Act for this year. Far from being designed to bring FHA housing to these villages, it is planned around the need for basic, warm housing—plus, the construction within the villages of such basic necessities as a source of safe water, sewage facilities and, possibly, a source of electricity. It is neither intended nor planned that all these things shall come to these people as a gift. Rather, it is hoped that a means for them paying in accord with their ability to pay will be devised and carried through. The end result will be not only an upgrade in the standard of living, but also a large lift in the general pride—pride based upon their portion of the achievement.

As conceived, this would be the first of a series of steps, over a period of years, which would enable these people to walk erect and side by side in this complex civilization which we are building. When they do, then they will form a tremendous future market for FHA housing . . .