

# Roll Specialist Weathers Sophisticated Press Corps

ANCHORAGE, Ak. — Take a pretty young Eskimo from a remote Alaskan Village on the Bering Sea, subject her to the sophisticated press corps of California, Oregon and Washington, and the results come out typically and uniquely Alaskan.

On a whirlwind tour last month to sound the call for all Alaskan Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts who live in the "South 49" (Alaskan jargon for anywhere but Alaska) to enroll for a share in the massive \$900-million-plus Alaska Native Land Claims Settlement, Frances Degan astounded many experienced interviewers.

A guest on an open-line Seattle radio show, the 29-year-old Eskimo from Unalakleet, a representative of the B.I.A. Anchorage Enrollment Office, explained, "No one called in to ask about the settlement."

"All the calls to the program were from Alaskans who live in the Seattle area. They ran the gamut from 'hi there, Fran, how are you?' to 'glad you're down here, gee you sound different on radio,' to a multitude of calls asking me to deliver messages to their friends and relatives when I returned to Alaska," she explains.

News interviews, too, resulted in the public relations firm which was handling her tour being inundated with messages to Frances from former classmates, friends and acquaintances who just wanted to say "Hello."

"And it happened in every town we visited," she explains. "Was she frightened about the task before her? 'At first,' she says, 'I didn't know where I was going as I had never been in any of those cities before. And I had no idea what I'd be confronted with.'"

The worst moment for her, she recalls, was when she was introduced to the press as being "about to explain the land claims in Eskimo."

"I almost panicked," she says. "Though my immediate family speaks both Eskimo and English, (her brother is a member of the Alaska State Legislature and her father is Unalakleet Village Council President as well as long-time Alaska Territorial legislator) I so seldom speak it, I've forgotten most of it."

How did she handle the introduction?

"I said 'hello, how are you, I hope everything is fine' in Es-



FRANCES DEGNAN

kimo. At least I hope that's what I said," she adds ruefully.

When the press corps heard (in English) that the settlement voted by Congress last year, amounts to nearly \$1 billion, the most often asked question was "how much does each Native get?"

"It's such a difficult question to answer in a few sentences," Frances explains. "The settlement provides \$465.5 million in federal funds, and another \$500 million to be paid from a 2 percent royalty on minerals from

federal and state lands." In addition, Alaska Natives are eligible for 40 million acres of land.

Some \$75,000 Alaska Natives are expected to be eligible to share in the claims. "But it's not a per capita settlement the way it's been with other tribes, where the money is divided up among the individuals. The land and most of the money will be distributed among twelve regional corporations formed along geographic lines on a per capita basis.

"Each corporation, comprised of Native stockholders, will in turn either redistribute or invest — or both — the monies received," Frances explains.

The perky young University of Alaska graduate also had to juggle such questions as "Do you live in ice houses?" ("Never seen one."), "What is whal blubber?" ("An Eskimo delicacy we call muktuk.") and the inevitable "Is it cold there?" ("In winter below zero, but we love it. In summer, temperatures that can soar to 70 degrees.")

The press tour took her to Seattle, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington; Sacramento, California; Portland, Salem and Eugene, Oregon.

An estimated 14-20,000 Natives live outside Alaska and are eligible to participate in the claims settlement, according to Miss Degan. "While most are estimated to live on the West Coast," she explains, "we've received applications from over 1700 communities in all 50 states as well as from 17 foreign countries."

Who is eligible? Any person who has one-quarter Alaskan Indian, Eskimo or Aleut blood, even if he was not born in Alaska.

"And that means that adopted youngsters, a second generation Californian or New Yorker, may all be eligible," Frances says.

Is she ready to search the Middle West and the East Coast of America in her search for Alaskan Natives?

"I am now," she says with new assurance. "But it's a formidable job, as we've got to find them all before the rolls close next March."

For further information, write: Alaska Native Enrollment Office, Pouch 7-1971 (B), Anchorage, Alaska 99510.