

A grand time was had at Nome Inaugural Ball

By BILL HESS
Tundra Times

It seems fitting that a dog team should be used to bring Inaugural Ball revelers to Nome to celebrate the election of Bill Sheffield as Alaska Governor but Charlie Johnson didn't quite count on the weather when he hitched his team up.

Johnson, president of the Bering Straits Native Regional Corp., left White Mountain for the 50-plus mile trip to Nome on the day before the Inaugural festivities in his city. But ran into a bit of a problem — weather severe enough to make a seasoned Iditarod runner blanch.

Temperatures dropped to 32 degrees below zero and the wind was blowing at about 20 knots, creating a wind chill factor too cold to think about.

"We found a cabin that night," Johnson recalls. "That was the most welcome sight I have ever seen." But the next morning it was back out into the cold, and a race with the clock to the Inaugural Ball.

Twenty miles out of Nome Johnson decided he was going to lose that race and he traded

his dogs in on a snowmobile.

A few hours later his eyes were slightly windburned but he was decked out in formal evening attire, sampling fine cheeses from the refreshment table, and chatting with other guests who had come to honor the governor they had put into office.

Two different organizers of the ball described it as a very "elegant" affair, and thus it was. Parachutes were draped in a pleasing way from the ceiling and the word "Alaska" was spelled out in little lights on the wall, along with a star.

Two fountains at the ends of the refreshment table gurgled red and white wines. There were fine cheeses, fresh fruits, and fancy little cakes called "petit fours." While at least one military man was dancing in fatigues, most of the nearly 400 people gathered were splendid in fine evening suits and gowns, including many, many tuxedos.

When one reporter walked through the door wearing a pair of slacks and a dress shirt with no tie, he was met by an elegantly-clad woman who put her hand to her mouth with a

horrified little gasp. "We wanted . . . well, oh my!" she said "You could at least take off your hat!"

This seemed like a very logical thing to do now that the sub-zero temperatures were shut outside, and he did.

Elsewhere in the crowd, one good Nome citizen noted that for 35 years, he had successfully escaped wearing a tie, but not tonight. So what if his wife was slightly irritated by the fact that a few mustard stains dotted the pink material. It was a tie.

Linda Chase, who was in charge of "Events," not only for Nome but the other balls, praised all those who participated in making this event special.

"It took a whole lot of people who had to put in a whole lot of time and a whole lot of effort," said Chase. The people of Nome, she said, really came through in preparing their community, and in fixing refreshments for some of the events which preceded the ball.

She gave special praises to Lee Fuller, chairwoman of the Nome event, and to Dale Kuykendall who worked closely with her.

Johnson echoed the theme expressed by many others in attendance, that Governor Sheffield is in an excellent position to unify the state. "Holding his first inaugural out here is a good start. Nome was the first place to put Sheffield in the lead. I think it's appropriate that his first inaugural be held here," Johnson said.

Although people in the Northwest were pleased that their area had been chosen to begin the statewide festivities, which would then move on to Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau; John Schaeffer, president of NANA noted that it was customary to hold the celebration in Nome. "Egan held his inaugurals here," Schaeffer remembered. "It was only during the last eight years that the Hammond administration got away from the tradition. Nome has long been the social center of the Northwest."

Sheffield, who had been the guest of honor at an invitation-only reception, arrived at his party shortly after 10 p.m. He was escorted in to the festivities by the Crow Creek Pipes and Drum to Scottish bagpipe music. The National Anthem was performed by the 172nd Infantry Brigade (Alaska) Band, which also provided dance music for the evening while the Alaska National Guard First Battalion presented the colors.

Mayor Leo Rasmusson, who had been quoted extensively in the Nome Nugget newspaper in opposition to Sheffield's recent stand seeking a delay in scheduled oil lease sales, made the official greetings, and State House Representative Jack Fuller introduced the



The Karavan dancers from Anchorage performed dances originating in Russia.

governor.

As a spotlight fell upon him, Sheffield nudged the bowtie which topped off the tuxedo he wore. "If you hadn't turned out like you did on election day," he told those gathered, "some guy who wears one of these bowties every day might have come to Nome instead!" Tom Fink, Sheffield's Republican opponent in the election, capitalized upon his bowtie during campaign battles.

Earlier in the day, a special breakfast complete with reindeer sausage was held. Later, the governor shared a subsistence foods lunch with Native Elders gathered at the senior center, and then participated in dedication ceremonies for the community's new visitor information center and the Nome Public School's new swimming pool.

At the Visitor's Center, Sheffield's sense of humor came shining through. Mayor



It was a festive crowd that gathered to dance the night away at Governor Sheffield's first Inaugural Ball.



A member of the Crow Creek Pipes and Drums performs to Scottish music.

Rasmusson announced that he was about to present the new governor a gift. "What is it?" Sheffield asked, "a newspaper?" He referred to the Nugget article in which Rasmusson had taken a strong stand against Sheffield's request to the federal government to delay oil activities in Norton Sound for two years.

Most of the Native population of the region favor a delay. Sheffield promised that once adequate studies and measures are taken to insure the safety of the region's environment, then he would be a most active supporter of oil sales in the area.

In the afternoon, a special celebration was held in Nome's Mini-Convention Center. The Crow Creek Pipes and Drums

from Anchorage were featured along with the King Island Dancers, the Karavan Dancers who performed Russian dancing, the Nome Junior Olympics, the St. Lawrence Island Dancers, and western music by Louis Green and Crew.

Stan Summers sang the Alaska State Flag Song, as he would later at the ball itself. Chase noted that the community chose the different types of performers to express the theme of unity among all peoples of the state.



The St. Lawrence Island dancers were among those gathered in what the new administration hopes is the beginning of a new Alaskan unity.
PHOTOS BY BILL HESS



A St. Lawrence Island dancer awaits her turn to dance.



Governor Sheffield is the object of some admiring glances as the Crow Creek Pipes and Drums group prepares to escort him onto the ballroom floor in Nome.