



PHOTO BY BILL HESS

Bell Herbert of Chalkyitsik is reported to be 128 years of age and the oldest person living in Alaska. That would have made her a young girl when the civil war broke out, a war in a foreign land so far away that who would have cared?

Elderly housing planned

By BILL HESS
Tundra Times Staff

Construction of a \$12 million dollar 60-unit housing project designed to meet the special needs of Alaska Native elders is expected to begin soon in Anchorage.

The project will be the first step in building a community which should eventually include 120 apartments, a community area sufficient to hold a potlatch in, medical and dental clinics, workrooms for traditional and other craft work, and where planned activities will include the gathering and preparation of subsistence foods.

The project will be the result of cooperation between

Native profit and non-profit corporations with federal, state, and city agencies. The community will rest on 11 acres of a 19.7 acre plot of land which Cook Inlet Region, Inc., a Native corporation, just received title to from the federal government. Negotiations between CIRI and the Cook Inlet Native association over the fair market value of the land are currently underway. Once CINA purchases the land, a combination of federal and state funds will be used to construct and run the project, the planning, construction, and operation of which will be overseen by the Cook Inlet Housing Authority.

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Project seeks to help elderly fight inflation

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Max Dolchak, Executive Director of CIHA and a member of the board of directors of CINA, stresses that due to an increasing number of Native elders moving into the Anchorage area, coupled with a tight housing market and an environment where the lifestyles and traditions of the elders are generally overlooked, there is a dire need for such a project.

A feasibility study commissioned by CIHA shows that there probably are 800-1000 Native elderly living in Anchorage, and that the number is likely to grow rapidly. The city has been experiencing a population explosion lately, and large numbers of

people have been finding themselves competing for apartments and rental units where few are available, and where many landlords have taken advantage of the situation to continually raise rents, often by \$100 and even more in a single jump.

"This comes down hardest on people living on fixed incomes," Dolchak explains. "Most of our Native elderly live on fixed incomes. They just can't afford an increase of \$100!"

Although the community is being planned with the specific needs of Natives in mind, it will be open to the elderly of all races. A similar CIHA project in Seldovia has turned out to have a population of

about half Native and half non-Native.

The costs for the development of 60 624-square-foot housing units themselves, plus the community room and medical and dental clinics, is expected to come to \$6,694,000. A cultural center and day care center will add just over \$2 million more, with outpatient housing to accommodate visitors who have come to Anchorage from rural areas for medical treatment but who do not require hospitalization adding another \$3,300,000.

Half of the tab will be picked up by the state of Alaska, and the other half through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, according to information received from CIHA.

CIHA officials claim the project to be the first of its kind not only in Alaska, but also in the Nation. As such, HUD has taken it on as a demonstrational project, and the

secretary himself has taken a personal interest in it.

Elderly Natives living in Anchorage have most often come to the city from the villages, according to the feasibility study. They have been drawn to Anchorage in search of better health care, better employment, to be nearer to family members who have already relocated to the city, or perhaps to provide their children and grandchildren with better educational and employment opportunities.

Their own needs, including the nutrition they received from their traditional subsistence lifestyles, often can be lost in the fast, often indifferent pace of city life. Special activities are planned for residents of the future community to take their needs into consideration.

For example, the feasibility study calls for regular trips into nearby wilderness areas for fishing and berry picking, and for sufficient space to al-

low elderly Natives to construct, display, and sell their Native crafts.

Roy Huhndorf, president of CIRA, says that by providing the land for CINA to purchase, the corporation is meeting its obligation to shareholders in different ways. "Obviously, it is among the goals of the corporation to use our influence to whatever extent possible to work our assets to the benefit of our shareholders."

Huhndorf stresses that the 11 acres will be sold to CINA at the fair market price because the first obligation that the corporation has is to turn a profit. "In all probability, a good many residents of the new elderly center will be shareholders from our corporation," Huhndorf says that in this way, the corporation also is helping to meet the social needs of its shareholders, as well as those of other Natives, by selling the land to CINA, rather than putting it to some other use.