

What about tourism in rural Alaska?

by Ben Barrera, NBA Vice President and Manager, Corporate Relations Dept.

Rural Tourism. Does that phrase bring employment to mind? Does it mean economic development and much needed cash to your community and yourself? Does that phrase bring frustration to mind because you have looked into rural tourism and found the numerous pitfalls? Is rural tourism or any kind of tourism open only to the rich guys? How can the rural small business benefit from the one industry that now brings over 900,000 visitors to our state?

How can a village, largely unknown to the outside world but holding tremendous promise because of its uniqueness, market itself as a tourism destination? Does a village really have a chance at competing with better known destinations such as Glacier Bay, Denali National Park, Anchorage, Portage Glacier and others who have spent millions promoting themselves? How much will it cost to attract even a small number of tourists?

Time and again we at National Bank of Alaska have been approached for advice and assistance on the subject of rural tourism. To many who have faced these questions the answers are unsatisfactory. "There is a lot of interest but too little knowledge." "The lack of experience and sufficient capital is too great to make a go of it."

If you, your rural community, your business or your Native corporation are interested in investigating more satisfactory answers to the above questions please call us here at the Business Cache.

We are willing to create a forum for established tourism businesses to meet with rural lodge and hotel owners, with charter boat and sightseeing tour operators, with rural gift shops catering to the visitor industry and with those interested in starting a new tourism business. If enough persons express an interest, National Bank of Alaska, the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference and the Prince William Sound Tourism Coalition will facilitate this gathering of those interested in rural tourism.

Participation in this forum may mean that you will be called upon to discuss the potential for rural tourism in your region and in your community. You will be asked if there is a consensus in your village for developing tourism as a resource. And you may very well meet a large tour operator who is seeking a joint venture with a hard working, industrious operator of a village destination. You will also meet your competition which, as you know, is one of the strongest tenets of business: "know your competition."

To express your interest and to be added to our list of those interested in rural tourism, please call 265-2133. ■

