

# Silver Hand Helps Buyers

In 1971, the State of Alaska instituted the Silver Hand Identification Program to help buyers distinguish authentic Alaska Native handicrafts from mass manufactured items.

The program has been widely accepted by retailers and buyers alike. "Through the Silver Hand Identification Program we are trying to eliminate deception as to what is Alaskan made," remarked Nick Carney, head of the state's Silver Hand Identification Program.

"For example, totem poles, authentically, are carved by Southeast region Indians from yellow or red cedar. Unfortunately, some totems on the market are made of plastic, or molded wood fibers, or are cast in various plasters. Others are genuinely whittled, but made in Japan."

Carney went on to explain that baleen, a fibrous material from the mouths of some whales, is also being copied in plastic. Genuine baleen is generally black with grey streaking, or matte or shiny finish. It is made into bracelets, pendants, model boats and baskets.

"If you're buying ivory, authentic Alaska Native ivory is of walrus," said Carney. "Sometimes, items passed off as Alas-

kan are really elephant ivory, carved by hand or machine in Seattle or the Orient. Old walrus ivory often turns to darker shades, but it can be simulated, dyed with chemical formulas or even coffee," he added.

The Silver Hand Program differentiates between the truly Alaskan and the imitation artifact.

At the moment, Henry Tiffany, of the Alaska Native Arts & Crafts Co-op, is gearing a small space ad campaign to this deception, urging prospective buyers to question the articles they wish to purchase.

"Alaskan designed" does not necessarily mean handmade by an Alaska Native here in Alaska," said Tiffany. "Sometimes, as with silver jewelry, the design may have been stamped on, out of the state," he added.

To make sure that the Silver Hand sticker is not misused, the state has its personnel make periodic shopping tours to see that all items tagged are the genuine article.

Thus, the buyer who is looking for authentic Alaska Native handicraft is assured when he sees the Silver Hand sticker or tag on the item he wishes to purchase.