

3 more villages restrict alcohol

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

The recent vote by residents of Kobuk, banning the sale and importation of alcoholic beverages in their community, makes the NANA region the first Native region in Alaska to have all its villages tightening liquor laws.

Kobuk's new regulations go into effect May 1.

In other areas of the state, voters in Atka and Huslia also recently decided to more strictly control alcoholic products, and the restrictions went into effect April 1.

Pete Schaeffer, vice president of

NANA Regional Corp. in Kotzebue, said changing status with the local option is an obvious way for communities to change in a positive way.

"The biggest impact from changing status is the change in a regional attitude toward liquor, and the impact of that is just profound," Schaeffer said during a telephone interview last week.

Tina Jones, city administrator of Kobuk, said the vote there to ban the sale and importation of alcohol was influenced heavily by surrounding villages. And she said that the residents of Kobuk are aware that they are the last village in the NANA

region to tighten liquor laws.

"Everybody in Kobuk is pleased about the vote, and we hope it will stop bootlegging in our community," Jones said.

Not only will it cut down bootlegging, Schaeffer said, but it will help cut crime and violence, too.

He said one of the biggest impacts of Kotzebue's ban on the sale of alcohol is on search and rescue.

"Before Kotzebue voted to become damp last year, there were search and rescues on the average of almost two a day. But now it's down to only about two search and rescues for the whole

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• Local option

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year," Schaeffer said.

Within the last 10 years or so communities around the state have used the local option law — banning the sale, importation or possession of alcoholic beverages — to regulate alcohol and thus improve their communities by reducing bootlegging, violence, crime and search and rescue operations.

William Roche, enforcement supervisor for the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board in Anchorage, said the fact that so many communities are taking this type of action shows that voters are identifying alcohol as a problem in their community. They want to eliminate the problem by enforcing the law and making penalties more serious when the law is broken.

Julie Dirks, city administrator of Atka, said a petition was submitted, and the vote was 22-16 to ban the sale and importation of alcohol.

Dirks said that she thinks Atka is the first community in the Aleutians to change status. St. Paul tried it once but the issue failed to pass.

She explained that Atka's isolation makes the voters more independent.

"We're way out here by ourselves," Dirks said.

Elsie Vent, city administrator of Huslia, a community in the Doyon region, said voters decided to ban the sale of alcohol because bootlegging was getting out of hand. The vote was 37-13.

"There was too much bootlegging going on, and nobody could enforce it. Now it's illegal to sell alcohol, and the VPSO can do something about the bootlegging. It is a felony," Vent said.

The ABC Board's Roche said Kaktovik, an Arctic Slope region village, has shown an interest in banning the possession of alcohol. And if they do, that region would become the second in the state to have every village restricting alcohol in some way.

Besides the three communities recently voting, there are 86 communities around the state of Alaska regulating alcoholic product sales, possession or importation.