

Romance, Popcorn Pop In Noorvik

Senator Gruening learned this week how two VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) volunteers at Noorvik obtained a popcorn machine for that Eskimo village and in the process apparently got things popping for themselves.

The volunteers, Judy Ames of Altadena, California, and Harold Bruce of Wheaton, Minnesota, were sent to Noorvik by the Office of Economic Opportunity last winter. Median per capita income in the area containing this village of 384 population on the Kobuk River east of Kotzebue is only \$2,339 per family.

One of the first reports which the young VISTA workers relayed to headquarters of the program in Washington (it eventually reached the desk of Director Sargent Shriver) was that Noorvik was badly in need of a popcorn machine.

The situation Harold and Judy reported was that popcorn was in lively demand in the village theater, but that residents were handicapped because there was no way of popping the corn at home.

All popcorn consumed there was popped elsewhere and flown to Noorvik by airplane. The item had more than dietetic or acoustic significance in that proceeds from the sale of popcorn at the theater in Noorvik are used by a Mother's Club for good works around the town.

Director Shriver turned the popcorn machine plea over to Mike Sher, who works on congressional relations at the Office of Economic Opportunity. Mike sent out feelers for a popcorn machine, and one of the first things he learned was that the big machines found in theater lobbies all over the United States don't pop popcorn at all. They only dispense it.

A popcorn machine which actually pops popcorn was located, however, through the good offices of Jaques Rion, managing director of the Golden Gate Theater in San Francisco.

The machine was in the possession of Arthur Unger of San Francisco, who sells equipment and machinery. Mr. Unger had a price tag of \$150 on the machine but offered to sell it at half price in view of the good purpose and the dis-

tant location involved.

In communicating this information to OEO in Washington Mr. Rion volunteered that he would pay one half of the reduced price, or \$37.50 if OEO could come up with a like amount.

It seems there is no item in the budget of the Office of Economic Opportunity for purchase of used popcorn machines, so Sher passed the hat around the 8th floor of the Brown Building in Washington, where the OEO staff has its headquarters.

He collected enough to match Rion's contribution. The machine was purchased from Unger, Rion threw in a year's supply of unpopped corn and these items were shipped to Noorvik.

When OEO sought to notify Harold Bruce and Judy Ames of success in the effort, the word which came back from Noorvik was that they had left the village on annual leave and, in fact, were headed back to the lower 48 to get married.

Now they have returned to Noorvik as man and wife, the popcorn machine has arrived and the Natives are no longer restless.