

## RDD: Supporting Stronger Local Economies

The Rural Development Division was created in 1987 to provide a clear focus for DCRA's goal of assisting rural Alaskan communities to

strengthen and diversify their local economies. RDD offers a wide range of programs which support community and economic development.

### PROFILE



**Mike Harper**  
Director, RDD

Born and raised in Fairbanks, Mike Harper has a long history of involvement with the development of rural Alaska. After graduating from the University of Georgia with a degree in Business Administration, and a term in the Army, Mike went to work for RurAL CAP in 1971 as a Community Developer. He next worked for the State, including a period with DCRA. In the eight years prior to his appointment as Director of RDD in March, 1987, he worked in the banking business, specializing in rural development concerns.

What made him happiest as a

Bank Loan Officer was to see people take their dreams and ideas, develop them into clear business plans, convince Mike to make them a loan, and then to succeed at their dreams. He especially loved to see this occur in "bush" Alaska where people often don't have the same access as people elsewhere to opportunities to realize their development dreams.

Mike understands that rural Alaskan development presents a dilemma of how to create local jobs and business opportunities while maintaining important cultural values and traditional lifestyles. To a degree, the introduction of government social service programs in the 1950's diminished the traditional self sufficiency of many rural people. In more recent times rural people are taking the initiative to promote local economic development opportunities in order to diversify their local economies which in turn enhance a basic subsistence lifestyle. Mike hopes that his experience in establishing Native non-profit organizations, setting up one of the first revolving loan funds in Alaska for energy projects, and working on various business proposals as a board member of one of ANCSA's corporations, will help him to contribute to this goal.

### PROFILE



**Bob Brean**  
Deputy Director, RDD

Bob Brean was raised in Tanacross, a small Native village of about 180 people. At the age of fifteen, Bob got a job with the Bureau of Land Management supporting fire fighting crews in the field. His job with BLM took him to almost every town and village in Alaska. Bob considers this exposure to the wide spectrum of Alaskan cultures and peoples to be one of the most valuable learning experiences of his life.

Bob went on to work at a variety of rural construction jobs before taking a job with the Upper Tanana Development Corporation (UTDC). He ultimately became the Executive Director of that corporation in 1979. During this time Bob functioned as a State RurAL CAP board member and was elected Chairman in 1981. He held the position with UTDC for four years until starting work for DCRA as Deputy Director of the Rural Development Division. He is also the current president of Tanacross, Inc., a Native Village Corporation formed under ANCSA.

Bob's responsibilities with RDD include the management and administration of a range of community development programs, including energy conservation and weatherization, Child Care and JTPA job training.

### PROFILE



**Chuck Akers**  
Deputy Director, RDD

Chuloonawick, "the place where they salt fish," was the childhood home of Chuck Akers. His family's salt fish processing business was begun near the Yukon River community of Marshall and later moved to a location at the mouth of the Yukon. The business gave rise to a community, and its name, Chuloonawick.

A lifelong Alaskan resident, Chuck has lived and worked throughout Alaska. Before coming to DCRA, Chuck worked with the Community Enterprise Development Corporation and as General Manager for the Unalakleet Native Corporation. His experience in these positions reinforced his belief that successful business development in rural Alaska requires a coordinated effort between all community entities. Working together to make the most of available outside economic development resources, a unified community approach has the best chance for creating stable local job opportunities appropriate for the community. Chuck has direct responsibility for managing the Department's Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) Program which is designed to coordinate the Department's job training and economic development resources.