

Villagers Enthusiastic—

Humble Aids Toksook Bay Pottery

The villagers of Toksook are going to pot and Stan Zielinski, assistant professor teaching ceramics at University of Alaska, is helping them. It's part of of his assignment in a unique art program backed by Humble Oil Company.

Through a \$10,000 grant, Humble has dispatched a team of artists to rural Alaska to

introduce new arts and help preserve old ones. It is their job to spark new interest in Native crafts, discover what is going on among established bush artists and, in the bargain perhaps, interest youngsters in some of the art programs at University of Alaska.

The Toksook project is unusual because pottery is not a traditional art among Alaskan Natives. Villagers learned of it about 10 years ago from Mrs. Carl Wobsen, a teacher who made pottery a hobby, Zielinski reports.

"At that time villagers lived in Nightmute. They moved later to Toksook but they remembered the kind of work Mrs. Wobsen did. They wanted to know more about it and requested help from the University Ceramics Department which essentially is me."

Zielinski has been working

on some technical problems, testing clays in that area and showing villagers what can be done with ceramics.

"It's more than just pots," he explained. "I brought 30 pound of samples to show them; things made of glass porcelain and enamel."

Villagers were enthusiastic and with funding from Community Enterprise Development Corp., placed an ad to hire a director for a pottery business. Out of 100 applicants, they selected Vern Sanford and his wife from Oregon as artists in residence. They will arrive in August.

Zielinski has visited dozens of villages besides Toksook. Early this summer he traveled widely in the Arctic and now is touring Southeastern.

Also working on the program are Glen Simpson, silversmith; Helmut Von Flein, sculptor; Terri Choy, print maker; Kate Duncan, art historian; Ron Senegutuk, artist who works with wood and silver; and Melvin Olanna, a versatile Native artist.

"Since ceramics are practically nonexistent in the bush, I'm interested in whatever arts and crafts people are doing and there are some pretty good things going on," Zielinski concludes.

"There was some concern about the place falling apart... the old arts dying. But there's no way in the world that's going to happen! There isn't one village I've been where there isn't something good going on."

And that's a "Humble" opinion, too.