

BETHEL HIGH SCHOOL REELS

Honey-Bucket, Water Barrel System at New Bethel High School

By JACQUELINE GLASGOW
Staff Writer

Picture operating a temporary honey-bucket and water barrel system in a brand new \$6 million school of four hundred students with the usual healthy human needs.

After a full month's closure due to a freeze-up of the two water systems, Bethel Regional High School and its adjoining \$4 million dormitory reopened its doors January 23, bringing students back in from the bush after a much-extended Christmas vacation.

Plagued from the beginning by late opening, non-arrival of books, supplies and equipment, and the usual bugs in a new

building complex, the new school was finally closed down after a series of freeze-ups following the advent of cold weather and severe winds.

The total cost of repairs needed will be somewhere in excess of \$100,000, with the cause of the breakdown as yet undetermined and under investigation by the State Division of Buildings.

Whether it is a flaw in the design or in the construction will determine whether blame is to be put on the architect or the contractor. Both water lines and sewer lines were frozen, as well as the sprinkler system for fire protection. Lines began to suffer partial freeze-ups off

(Continued on page 6)

Honey-Bucket System ...

(Continued from page 1)

and on, pipes burst, honey buckets were brought to the rescue, and after much inconvenience, the entire school was shut down on Dec. 22.

When temporary repairs were finally effected in mid-January, the second crisis evolved. Bethel Heights, the ASHA housing project, which supplied water to the school, suffered its own freeze-up and, due to lowered water pressure, the school could not utilize the above-ground line that had been installed. Honey-buckets and water barrels were again the only recourse. Students who thought they were coming in to a modern new school had a slightly less than modern experience.

An official of the State Operated Schools said it would be difficult to determine how many students did not return because of the difficulties.

"In any new school, you are going to get some transfers. There were probably some students who DID get impatient."

Bethel Regional High School has a total enrollment of about four hundred students, of which a good half are dormitory or Boarding Home students.

Lee Hayes, in charge of new construction for SOS, said the regional high school concept has now been abandoned. Plans now exist for smaller area high schools, so that students can attend schools in their own community.

Voters of the state last year approved a bond issue, Chapter 195/1972, for a total of \$16 million for bush schools. Twelve schools are now in the planning stages, at \$1 million each, with the extra \$4 million to be spread overall.

Designs are completed and bids are almost ready to be submitted for units at Kiana, Selawik, and Noorvik. Soon to follow will be schools at Emmonak, Togiak, Kipnuk, St. Lawrence Island, Kwethluk, Prince of Wales Island, Alakanuk, Nelson Island, St. Mary's, Nunapitchuk, Sand Point, and Bethel Elementary.

While each of the schools may differ in appearance, they will use a standardized construction, duplicating foundation systems, heating systems, electrical systems, and so forth.

Hayes is hopeful they will avoid some of the problems encountered at Bethel High School, which was an independently designed structure. Wherever these new schools are placed, however, they will be adding an additional burden on the existing water and sewer facilities, already inadequate in far too many bush communities.

Hayes is not sure who will administer the construction of the new schools with a proposal now pending before the Legislature to turn the entire State Operated School System over to local school boards.

"However, the money is appropriated and the schools WILL be built, regardless of who administers the system," Hayes stated.

Bethel teachers are hopeful that Commissioner of Education Lind will make a ruling to allow an approved closure of nine days due to the winter freeze-up, leaving only 10 or 11 days which will have to be made up by the students.

This could be accomplished by having classes on Saturdays or by extending school into Easter vacation and running an extra week in June. In any case, this year's students at Bethel Regional High School may receive practical experience credits in water and sewer systems, temporary and otherwise, and unless Alaska school construction improves radically in the next few years, it may well become a required subject.