

Northwest Arctic Borough marks first anniversary

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

The Northwest Arctic Borough, based in Kotzebue, recently celebrated its first anniversary.

The borough, which has been facing an unemployment rate of 60 percent, signed a 14-year service contract with Cominco Alaska Inc. last February. The contract makes available almost \$26 million to the borough in service funds.

Cominco will be developing a major lead-zinc mine in the borough, which will provide a big boost to the local economy.

Maj. Gen. John Schaeffer of Kotzebue was the first mayor of the borough, and now is the commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

"Gen. Schaeffer did a real good job of getting the staff put together," said Jeff Smith, assistant to the mayor. "I think the general's greatest accomplishment was putting the borough's philosophy down in concrete."

The current administration — headed by Mayor Chuck Greene — considers itself conservative, said Smith. "I think we respect the individuality of each person."

"The continuing task of the borough will be to develop alternative resources for revenue, without raising taxes," said Smith when asked about the borough's future.

"We're facing poor economic conditions up there," he said, "and being a burden on the taxpayers is not affordable."