

CINA 20 years old

by Marilyn Richards

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"Who can remember 20 years ago?" asks former Anchorage mayor George Sullivan. But 20 years ago, the New York World's Fair was gearing up, the world's

tallest tree was discovered, Alaska was recovering from a devastating earthquake.

And through informal meetings 20 years ago, friends living in the state's largest city, de-
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CINA training ground for many leaders

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cided there was a need for a place for out of town villagers to visit. Through their efforts the Cook Inlet Native Association was born.

One of the first priorities of CINA was a Native welcome center, where news and information, gossip and food from "back home" was shared.

"Back then the only image of the Native that many had was one of Fourth Avenue," says Flore Lekanof, CINA's first president, now of St. George Tanaq Corporation.

When Lekanof was elected there was no money, no funds, no staff or employees, but many volunteers with lots of ideas. What started out as a small social group grew to be one of the largest non-profit organizations in the state.

"The Cook Inlet Native Association serves about 14,000 in Anchorage, Tyonek, Mat-Su Valley, Eklutna, Kenai, Ninilchik and Seldovia," says CINA planner Aleen Smith. "There is a \$5 million budget and over 100 permanent full-time employees."

CINA also takes credit, largely undisputed, for the formation of the Alaska Federation of Natives. CINA's early founders reads like a Who's Who list of Alaska and Native politics: Nick Gray, a key figure of the Fairbanks Native Association and the Kuskokwim Native Association who died in the late sixties; the late Laura Bergt Crockett; the late Eklutna Chief Mike Alex; the North Slope Borough's Lloyd Avakana; and Emil Notti, now state commissioner of the Department of Community and Regional Affairs.

CINA also served as a political training and spawning ground for the Anchorage Native

Caucus's Cliff Black, Cook Inlet Region executive vice-president Robert Rude, Bert Campbell, Debbie Fullenwider, Jacke Guzialek, Mike Symnanski, John Evans and scores of others.

CINA's four departments are the Alaska Native Community Center, Community Education, Health, and the Human Resources Development.

Past and present activities include ivory and soapstone carving, and successful events such as the statewide Native Youth Olympics and the Native Youth Art shows.

Other social services are the dental and family clinics, both the Community Health Representative and Community Health Aide programs, village emergency medical technicians, housing assistance, alcoholism counseling and referrals.

Education remains a matter of significant importance in CINA related programs. Natives of all ages have participated in a wide variety of services. Pre-school through teens and Elders have been offered classes, on the job training, employment or placement, and counseling.

CINA also sponsors a Miss CINA pageant where young Native women can have a chance to win scholarships and prizes. The Nick Gray Scholarships has awarded tens of thousands of dollars to hundreds of recipients in order that they might pursue vocational, college or technical studies.

Those monies come from bingo operations, though the CINA board has put a recent but temporary moratorium on the expenditures from the bingo proceeds.

While CINA plays an influential role in the day lives of many Native, it has not always been a smooth twenty years, "They've had five exec-

utive directors in three years" one observer notes. And Cook Inlet Region, Inc., the profit Native corporation established their own non-profit social service organization, the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. last summer.

"This has been a painful time for many," concedes Berry. "Why many of those who spent ten or so or more years helping CINA grow would start all over again," he reflected, "But so far, CINA has not lost any funding to CITC, though it might in the future."

Both organizations serve the same area. CITC has CINA alumni on its board of directors and its staff. Smith remains hopeful yet cautious that the CIRI board can address the CINA issues. Both the non-profits, and the profit will have new board

members elected.

It is ironic that though CINA was established as a place for Native to get together but has recently lost its of-

fice space for the Welcome Center. Morale remains high. ployees themselves have contributed over \$2500 to a fund to re-open the Welcome Center.