

Bristol Bay By-Lines Hits Streets at Dillingham Once Weekly

ANCHORAGE — A mimeograph machine replaces the roar of the big city presses and Bristol Bay By-Lines hits the streets just once a week, but folks are snatching it up in Dillingham.

The 12-page newspaper, crammed with reports on the government, fishing, economy, education, telephone troubles and a schedule of local meetings is answering a lot of questions and raising some too in Dillingham, a southwestern Alaska fishing community of 800 on Bristol Bay.

Editor Dorothy Anderson, heading a staff of 13 volunteers is frankly excited about the

newspaper she began three months ago, to serve 29 villages stretched over 55,000 square miles in southwestern Alaska.

"We can't stop now. We have to get news out," Anderson said in a recent interview on Insight, a Sunday morning program produced by KTVA-Channel 11. "I believe people are beginning to see issues. They have something to talk about — and we're trying to report things as they happen. We're not trying to analyze anything."

Raised in the midwest farm country, not far from the North Dakota border, Dorothy came to Alaska in the 1960s and married Nels Anderson, now executive

director of the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, while she was teaching school in Dillingham.

Later they moved to Anchorage, but last summer, with her husband holding down a new executive post, they returned to Dillingham with their three children.

Dillingham's basic links to the rest of the world are airplanes, newspapers that are flown in and armed forces television via King Salmon.

"I found it extremely frustrating that there was no means of communication — and there was a lot going on," she said.

"Those of us at home didn't know what was going on. We

We had a city council, a school of a pretty good size and now the land claims settlement bringing a regional corporation which covered 29 villages. We felt there should be something," she said.

In October a staff of 13 volunteers, mostly housewives, began putting out Bristol Bay By-Lines. "It's still kind of a novelty, but we're beginning now to get into some touchy things," Dorothy said.

An editorial raising some questions about local education brought some gripes.

"The reaction was, 'if you don't like it write a letter to the

editor', but so far people aren't quite willing to stick their necks out that far," mused the editor. "But we're getting there."

Despite its relatively small population, Dillingham has some problems in common with large American cities, namely airport expansion. There are several arguments for and against expansion of the runway, for which federal and state funds have been approved.

"We're not going to take sides; just tell what both sides are," said Dorothy.

But one objection is that the village is growing up around the proposed site of airport expansion and eventually there will be a jetport right in the middle of town.

There are also objections because of the terrain and cost for the amount of fill it will take to complete the expansion.

A poor fishing season last summer made a crippling dent in the economy and much space in Bristol Bay By-Lines goes to reports of what fishermen, the local Native corporation, the state and others are trying to do to remedy the situation.

"I remember one summer when my husband and I went home . . . and it was a poor year," Dorothy said. "The canneries started closing down . . . and it was just sad. It was the same way this summer. The people build up. They say next year it's going to be better . . . and then there are no fish. The same gloom settles over the town. Everyone's infected by it."

Is there any hope for a place like Dillingham, a community dependent largely on the coming of the fish?

"I can't look with pessimism," Dorothy said. "I'm not sure something will happen. People come back. It's a beautiful country."

"Dillingham is home for a lot of people. They were born and raised there. I don't know what there is about it, but it draws people back."

The Andersons live right in town, near Bristol Bay. "You sense the tides going in and out. You see the cakes of ice going down the river. You feel the wind and you're very conscious of the elements," Dorothy said. "I guess that's because the planes fly in and out . . . and if it's bad weather they don't come. Maybe you don't get any mail that day or if you're expecting someone, maybe they don't make it."

And what too will the folks in Dillingham think if the land claims is so successful that Dillingham becomes another Anchorage? Could it happen?

"I'm not sure," said Dorothy. "But I really like that place. It feels like home. Of course my husband comes from there and it's a good place for kids, a good place to raise children."