

Writer claims turmoil in Sitka IRA

(Editor's Note: The following commentary, offered by Andrew Hope of Sitka, does not necessarily represent the view of the Tundra Times. Response to the writer's views is encouraged from interested parties.)

By ANDREW HOPE

The Sitka Community Association (SCA), recognized by many government agencies as the tribal governing body of Sitka Native Americans, is torn with dissention over fundamental issues that go to the heart of federal "self-determination" programs. Factions are battling over such Native motherhood issues as Native hire, on the job training and the role of boards as opposed to that of management.

The SCA is currently without a manager, despite having gone through an agonizing two month selection process in which the board hired, at one time or another, all three finalists. Of the three finalists, (Pete Azure, Gary Kim, and John Purcell) only Azure was a native. Azure was also the only one from Sitka

with background knowledge of SCA.

Indeed, Azure is largely responsible for the current existence of SCA programs. In mid-1975, while working at Sheldon Jackson College on a Rockefeller fellowship he laid groundwork for reorganization of the association, which had lain dormant since the fifties. SCA was created in the late thirties under provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act.

When the Indian Self-Determination Act passed in the mid-seventies the opportunity for revitalization of dormant IRA councils opened up. The BIA decided that these councils would be recognized as tribal governing bodies eligible for per-capita revenues.

Azure was elected Acting Chairman of SCA until the initial election in the spring of 1976 when he was elected President of the Council. As President, he guided development of the association and eventually recommended the hiring

of Henry Cavallera, a former VISTA lawyer from Nevada.

Cavallera came in with all his idealistic guns blasting: he wanted to work himself out of a job; he would only take the job if he could train a Native; he would only work a year; after he passed the Alaska bar exam he would be willing to be retained by the association for a bargain basement rate. It sounded very sweet and liberal.

What happened to these plans? Cavallera ended up staying on for two years. He never got around to training a Native to run the show. (Isn't it ironic that a Native always must be trained and "broken-in" while a white man can step right in, roll up his sleeves and go to work.) He never passed the Alaska bar exam.

In an attempt to exit as gracefully as possible Cavallera began laying groundwork for a practice in Nevada. The association advertised for an assistant manager in May of this year but never did hire anyone for the position. Apparently Cavallera convinced them that the money wasn't there. The Native trainee went out the window despite the fact that it had been a long-time Council priority.

Azure moved to Seattle in early June, vacating his position of President of SCA. This vacancy wasn't filled until December 10. The failure of the Council to act on this vacancy is all too typical of their decision-making record and it had a real impact on the developments of the next six months.

The presidential vacancy left the Council with six seats, ripe for even splits on key votes. The Council was leaderless for six months, for the President is the main council member that the manager works with. Cavallera immediately began playing council members against each other in this leadership vacuum.

The Council finally advertised for a manager to replace Cavallera in October. November 1 was to be Cavallera's last day on the job. Four Natives applied for the manager position. Of the four one made the final three: Pete Azure.

The three finalists were brought in for interviews. Cavallera lobbied hard for Gary Kim and the board voted by a slim major-

ity to hire him despite the fact that he had no references and no experience in Alaska. Cavallera was apparently looking down the road at the potential consultant fees he could collect from the Council if they had to bring him back to assist a manager unfamiliar with SCA operations.

He presented the SCA Council with a proposal for them to fly him up from Nevada, pay him per diem, hotel costs and a fee but the Council never did take action on it.

Gary Kim wrote back immediately after being notified that he had been hired to say that he didn't want the job. The Council met and was stalemated — they still didn't want to hire Azure. As a "compromise" they decided to hire Azure as manager and John Purcell as deputy manager. However, Purcell's job wasn't advertised. The Council offered Azure \$25,000 and no moving expenses. Cavallera had been paid moving expenses and was making in excess of \$31,500 when he resigned.

Azure initially accepted the terms offered by the Council, but changed his mind when Cavallera hired one of the program directors at a higher salary than advertised. He requested \$30,000 and moving expenses from the Council and when they balked he returned to Seattle and found another job.

In the meantime, Cavallera (who was supposed to have resigned on November 1) continued to work as manager. He hired all of the program directors without consulting the council — a direct violation of personnel rules. The Council did not reprimand Cavallera in any way for these actions.

The Council is currently moving into a variety of federal contracts: C.E.T.A., B.I.A. Higher Education, Social Services and Housing Improvement, Johnson O'Malley and Indian Education programs. These contracts were available to the SCA because of its tribal government status.

It is readily apparent that non-Natives can wield a lot of power in tribal business given half a chance. Whether non-Natives should be participating at all in Native Self-Determina-

tion programs is highly questionable. The fact that it is happening and Natives are allowing it to happen.

Sure, we occasionally need technical assistance from white folks. We get into trouble when we allow the white "helpers" to call the shots for us, regardless of how well-intended or liberal they are. Native Self-Determination means Natives run their own programs and businesses. It means Natives get hired to run Native programs.

Perhaps "tribal government" is too confusing and undefined. Perhaps we don't know what a tribe is. Perhaps we don't care. Maybe it's all right for non-Natives to get rich from Native self-determination. If that is the case we're ready for the next step: Native termination.

In order to allow its employees an opportunity to enjoy the holiday season, the Tundra Times will publish on Fridays, rather than Wednesdays for the next two weeks.

The next two publication dates will be Friday, December 29 and Friday, January 5. Tundra Times offices will be closed on December 22, 25 and January 1.