

NW Arctic Borough Mayor's Race Begins

by A.J. McClanahan

The mayor's race for what potentially could be the second largest Native-dominated municipality in Alaska, the Northwest Arctic Borough, has attracted former NANA President John Schaeffer of Kotzebue.

Schaeffer, 47, was the only official candidate for the post by late last week. But he said he expected at least

one other person to file for the position by the April 18 deadline.

The Kotzebue Native said the formation of the borough is particularly important for Natives politically because they face eroding representation statewide as Anchorage's population increases.

"In 1990 Anchorage will control the legislature," he said. "We've continued to lose representation in the state."

Schaeffer said formation of stronger rural governments is one of the key ways Natives can maintain a vital political voice.

"My expectation is that other areas will form boroughs too," he said.

The election for the borough mayor and the 11 members of the assembly will be held May 20, and will include a vote by the people on whether the new borough should be formed. Little opposition to its creation is expected.

If created, the northwest Arctic Borough would encompass about 25 million acres, making it the second largest municipal government in Alaska. The North Slope Borough is



Candidate for Mayor John Schaeffer

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the largest, with about 52 million acres.

Included in the new borough's boundaries, which essentially match those of the NANA region, would be 2.1 million acres of land detached from the North Slope Borough, including the proposed Red Dog lead and zinc mine.

NAB would include a total population of about 6,000 people in the villages of Kotzebue, Deering, Noatak, Shungnak, Buckland, Kivalina, Kobuk, Ambler, Kiana, Selawik and Noorvik. They range in size from Kotzebue with about 2,800 people to Kobuk with about 60 people.

Eighty-five percent of the population of the area is Inupiat.

Schaeffer said because of the borough's Native majority he would try to focus on the needs of the region's people, if elected.

"The borough is supposed to represent the constituency," he said, adding that the borough would be run somewhat differently from other boroughs in the state.

"The emphasis would be on cultural values," he said.

One difference already has emerged. Schaeffer said before making a final decision on whether to run for the office he sought the advice of NANA region elders because he believes they should have a strong voice in major decisions.

As head of NANA Corp. for 14 years until stepping down in January Schaeffer attempted to work in a similar manner within the corporate

structure.

In 1982 when NANA undertook a 10-year evaluation Schaeffer said he realized that many of the corporation's material objectives were being met. At the same time, however, he said it became apparent that many of the region's problems, such as alcohol abuse, were as serious as ever.

An outgrowth of that concern led to the creation of "Inupiat Illitqusait," known as the region's "spirit program," and the development of Sivun-

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niigvik, a camp about 30 miles from Kotzebue.

"The spirit program is to teach and instill traditional values," Schaeffer said.

In the meantime, he said it's too early to tell what specific programs the borough would undertake, particularly since its tax base would be relatively small.

Schaeffer is a colonel in the Alaska Army National Guard.

He and his wife, Mary, have five children, John III, Susan, Jackie, Calvin and Cole, as well as four adopted children, Gertie, Bonnie, Jackie and Augie.