

'Subsistence is too important to me'

by Julie Petro
for the Tundra Times

Pete Schaeffer, the recently appointed acting vice president for NANA Regional Corp., has come a long ways in his 13 years of work for the Native regional corporation based in Kotzebue.

Schaeffer, 40, began working for NANA Construction Co. as a laborer in 1974. In 1975, he transferred to the Maintenance Department, where he eventually became the supervisor. From 1977 to 1986, he worked as the manager for Jade Mountain Products, a division of NANA Development Corp.

In January, NANA President Willie Hensley was appointed to fill Sen. Frank Ferguson's vacated seat in the state Senate, and Schaeffer was asked to become the acting vice president.

While Hensley is in Juneau, Schaeffer supervises the day-to-day operations of NANA Regional Corp.'s Land Department, museum and Inupiat Iitqusiat Program. The program, known as "The Spirit Program," focuses on preserving and promoting Inupiaq values.

When things start getting hectic, as before the annual meeting last month,



NANA

both of Schaeffer's phones may ring at the same time. The extra phone is left from the days when Schaeffer's brother, John, was president. The phone system was so bad that calls often were cut off, and the direct line became a necessity.

Raised in Kotzebue, Schaeffer comes from a family of 10 children.

Kotzebue did not have a high school in his early days, so Schaeffer went to Copper Valley High School for one year in 1961. He then took three years off to return home and subsistence hunt with his father.

"There were no snowmachines then, so I probably put a few thousand miles on my feet, chasing caribou in those days," Schaeffer said.

Schaeffer returned to attend high

school at Mt. Edgecumbe boarding school in Sitka, and he graduated from there in 1967.

In 1968, Schaeffer married Polly Sheldon from Noorvik and settled down to have a large family of his own. The Schaeffers now have eight children, and they will celebrate their 20th anniversary next year.

Schaeffer is active in local government as the president of the Northwest Arctic Borough Assembly and as the vice chairman of the Northwest Arctic Borough Charter Commission.

As a commercial fisherman, Schaeffer also devotes a considerable amount of time to representing the interests of Kotzebue fishermen on various boards and committees. He is currently chairman of the Kotzebue Fish and Game

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Advisory Committee, vice chairman of the Arctic Regional Council for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and a member of the Subsistence Resource Commission for the Cape Krusenstern National Monument.

"I've been in and out of politics since the early days, but like a lot of people, I've been too busy trying to raise the kids and make a living," Schaeffer said.

"In the last couple of years, I've had more time to become involved in the process," he said. "It's important for local people to be heard."

"If people are not involved in the system, they tend to get the short end of the stick. Subsistence is too important to me and my family to see that happen."