

# Health Board gets \$119,000 to promote health careers

by Holly F. Hallam

Tundra Times reporter

The Alaska Native Health Board has received a grant for \$119,000 to get rural Alaska Native high school juniors and seniors interested in health field careers.

Currently, there are few Alaska Native professionals in any of the health fields. So the program, Careers in Health for Alaska Natives, is designed to capture the youths' interest in a health career and then help students prepare for college.

Students are selected based on their grade point average, academic/economic disadvantage and interest in a

health career.

Denny DeGross, executive director of the health board, said there is a tremendous opportunity for professional health careers for Alaska Natives.

"It's very, very seldom that you see Alaska Native professionals in the health field in Alaska," DeGross said.

Although in many areas of the state a regional hospital may be the single biggest employer of Alaska Natives in the area, the turnover of Native employees is high and the Native employees are rarely the licensed physicians, dentists or surgical

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technicians.

Students selected to participate in the project will be enrolled into summer enrichment programs to better prepare them for higher education.

Following this will be a Corporate/Personal Mentor Program providing the student with a role model and first-hand experience in a medical field.

Personal and financial counseling will also be available to help students decide which area of health best fits them and how to attain financial aid for college. The health board also has a toll-free number — 1-800-478-2426.

The program is funded for the next three years. The first year 15 students are expected to join, and the second year the program will possibly double.

The program is aimed at rural Alaska Native students, but students who live in an urban area may call the health board to find out about other programs.

DeGross said the health board would actually like to have students younger than the high school age. He said this is because then the youths would have time to take all the necessary preparatory classes, unlike, for example, a junior who may not have enough time to even learn some of the basics.

DeGross said the prime age to get youths interested in a career is age 12 or 13, although the grant only allows for juniors and seniors in high school.

DeGross said the health board is trying to stimulate interest so these young people can work for their Native corporations. And he said if young people can get direction at an early age, they will have to take only a couple of basic courses a year.

"It would just be a little bit each year, math and science. All the basic stuff. And then you tell them it's out there for them to grab on to," DeGross said. "And it is."