

Feasibility Probe—

Study Commences on Native Arts Institute

A feasibility study scheduled for completion in December may result in the creation of an Institute of Alaska Native Arts in the State of Alaska.

The survey is currently being conducted throughout the state's villages and urban centers by three Alaskans for the Department of the Interior's National Indian Arts and Crafts Board.

Members of the survey team include Mrs. Laura Bergt and Mrs. Mary Jane Fate, both Fairbanks residents with a long history of involvement in Alaska Native affairs, and Eskimo journalist Thomas Richards Jr.

The coordinator for the survey project team, Mrs. Bergt, believes that the need is great for development of such an educational institution.

She explains, "The cultural direction in which society starts a Native will determine his future. It is for this reason that this educational institution for the State of Alaska must be founded with the innovative ideas and inspiration of the Alaska Native throughout the State."

The purpose of the survey, Mrs. Bergt said, is not so much

to promote the concept of a Native arts institute as it is to discover what opinions Alaskans have about the needs which might be met in the creation of the educational facility.

She added, "It must be understood that, along with the Native philosophy for this cultural institute, there would be the opportunity for the Alaska Native to advance his knowledge in other fields of philosophy, sciences and technology."

Precedent exists for creation of such an institute for Alaska Natives.

A national institution for the training of Native Americans in the arts was established in 1962 by the Department of the Interior.

The institute of American Indian Arts, located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, serves 300 students from more than 80 tribes of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The I.A.I.A. has met with much success in training young artists. This degree of success has encouraged the commissioners of the Interior Department's Na-

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SURVEY TEAM — The feasibility study of Institute of Alaska Native Arts has gotten off the ground and the study is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. The assignment is on the proposal of the Department of the Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board that believes that an Institute is feasible in Alaska. Three well known Native Alaskans have started on the work and they are, left to right, Mrs. Mary Jane Fate, Thomas Richards, Jr. and Mrs. Laura Bergt. Laura Bergt is chairman of the study committee.

— Photo by MARGIE BAUMAN

Institute of Native Arts

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tional Arts and Crafts Board, including Tundra Times Editor Howard Rock, to explore the possibility of starting a similar facility in Alaska.

There is also considerable interest among Interior Department officials and members of the Congress for expansion of such arts education programs from its present junior college accreditation into a full four-year college program.

A U.S. Senate subcommittee reported in 1969 that "the Institute has had considerable success in instilling a cultural pride in Indian students by providing them with opportunities for creative expression. The individual-oriented programs recognize the importance of a sense of identity."

The subcommittee added, "By becoming a college, the Institute could provide a collegewide curriculum for Indians which considers their culture and history — something unique in higher education."

The level of education which might be offered in an Institute of Alaska Native Arts is only one of a number of questions which will be researched by the survey

team.

Other questions include whether residents think the institute should emphasize subjects in traditional artistry or contemporary arts or in both areas, where such a facility should be located in Alaska, what type of student housing design should be adopted and how much attention should be given to development of marketing and other business-related courses.

The survey team is beginning to travel to Alaskan villages and cities in October and expects to furnish its report to the National Arts and Crafts Board by December 15.

The survey team members hope that this study will bring the Institute of Alaska Native Arts concept closer to becoming a reality.

Mrs. Bergt said, "It should assist the Alaska Natives in retaining their own cultural identity, utilizing their traditional methods and values, while extending their cultural values by learning the newest and innovative educational methods in the scientific and technological worlds."