

Emily Ivanoff Brown Honored by Prestigious 49ers Group

By JOYCE ZIMMERSCHIED

Emily Ivanoff Brown is retired from the teaching that filled her schedule for 30-years - but she hasn't retired from living as her present activities prove. And on a recent Friday night, she was honored for her contributions with membership in the much-sought-after "Alaska 49er" group.

Held in the Anchorage Westward Hotel, the awards banquet honored outstanding contributors to Alaska's economic and cultural development. Also chosen for the first time was Rep. Nick Begich, missing on a flight to Juneau since Oct. 16.

Others renominated to the club were Frank Peratovich of Klawock and Rusty Heurim of Ester. The late Harold Gillam and Alaska Chief Justice George F. Boney were elected as deceased Alaskans.

Mrs. Brown, in a TUNDRA TIMES interview, described herself as "just a simple Eskimo woman." The truth goes much deeper than that, however. Her story begins with her first teaching station - Kotzebue, 1928. From there, she ranged from Northwestern Alaska to the North Slope and as far south as Unalakleet, her birthplace.

As a result of living and teaching in the bush for such a long time, Mrs. Brown got to see the educational system from both sides of the fence, and to form some definite opinions about it.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs teachers, she said, did not do the job they should have,



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particularly in giving Native students a solid grounding in the English language. As an example, she pointed out that out of 400 Native students enrolled in the University of Alaska at one time, only three graduated.

Besides the language problem, many of them either didn't know about available counseling or were afraid to go in for it.

When she receives her master's degree in communicative arts, hopefully in May of 1973, she will have more time to work on one or all of the seven books she is currently writing about her people's history.

She also stated that she would like to do some counseling work, specifically of Native students, so that they will not be thrown into the world unprepared.

"God has been good to me. He wanted me to reach my goal," Mrs. Brown says.

She listed a number of illnesses and operations that could have been her back, but did not. Indeed, all her calm gentility, it is hard to imagine anything short of a Sherman tank stopping her from getting whatever she has set her heart on at any time.

In the meantime, she works two hours a day at the University's Wood Center, attends classes and somehow finds time to work on her thesis.

She speaks with obvious pride of her three sons. Leonard, the oldest, owns a lodge and restaurant in Unalakleet. Stanley works for the United Medical Laboratory in Washington and Melvin teaches in an Anchorage high school. She cited them as

proof that Native students, with proper encouragement, can do more with their lives than the somewhat limited resources most villages allow.

She is currently racing Melvin to see who will get their master's degree first. She has already beaten him by two years in acquiring a bachelor's degree, with hers coming in 1964 and his in 1966.

The "Alaska 49ers" title came as a surprise to Mrs. Brown. Notified by telegram one day before the banquet that "you are going to be honored. Please let us know if you can be here," she tore herself away from the remains of Thanksgiving dinner and headed for Anchorage.

"I didn't know what the award was for," she says, adding that her curiosity would have taken her there if nothing else had.

And so this quiet woman, who got through college herself by taking nine credits a semester for 11 summers while teaching and raising three children by herself, was repaid for her efforts in serving her people and her state.