

GCI plans aggressive bush expansion for summer

by *Tundra Times* staff

The pace is picking up at GCI as the company prepares for a busy season installing a whole new telecommunications network across much of the state.

After years of planning and analysis, the long-distance phone carrier has selected more than 50 village sites where its newly-approved rural services will be provided.

"This initiative will go a long way towards giving rural residents of the state the access they need and deserve to the latest developments in telecommunications, including better phone service, high-quality faxing and the Internet," said Margie Brown, senior advisor to GCI's Rural Services Team. "While we can't link up every community in the state just yet, this summer's construction program will bring rural Alaska significantly closer to the rest of the world."

The 50 small and medium-sized villages are located in the North Slope and Northwest regions, much of the Bering Straits regions

and Bristol Bay regions and the eastern Aleutians. The program is eventually intended to include communities in the Interior, Yukon-Kuskokwim, Kodiak and Southeast regions.

Brown said the network will be expanded as fast as regulators and market conditions allow, without sacrificing quality of service. She acknowledged that GCI had decided to defer several communities originally included on the list for this summer's construction program.

"Since we were limited to 50 village sites this go-around, we found that we needed to focus our efforts where we could provide good, region-wide coverage," said Brown.

She noted that important criteria for final site selection included being able to link smaller communities to larger regional hubs in order to enhance telecommunications for government, commerce, education and health services in a contiguous area, and extending service to areas not already targeted for some kind of upgrade or expansion.

"These were difficult choices.

The rural market is growing and changing rapidly like the rest of the world, but with its own unique needs," said Brown. "Our aim is to provide as extensive and responsive a network as we can, as fast as we can. Communities not included this summer should not feel they have been overlooked."

She encouraged prospective rural customers to call her to discuss their concerns. She can be reached at 1-800-770-1212.

Villages scheduled to receive the new GCI equipment include Anaktuvuk Pass, Atkasuk, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Pt. Hope, Pt. Lay, Wainwright, Akutan, Cold Bay, False Pass, King Cove, Nelson Lagoon, Sand Point, Clarks Point, Ekwok, Iliamna, Koliganek, Levelock, Manokotak, New Stuyahok, Nondalton, Togiak, Twin Hills, Chitgnik, Chignik Lagoon, Chignik Lake, Perryville, Pilot Point, and Port Heiden.

Other communities include Ambler, Buckland, Deering, Klana, Kivalina, Kobuk, Noatak, Noorvik, Selawik, Shungnak, Elim, Golovin, Koyuk, Shaktoolik, Shishmaref, St. Michael, Stebbins, Teller,

Unalakleet, Wales and White Mountain.

Villages which will be linked to the GCI network through other communities include Aleknagik, Ekuk, Newhalen, Naknek, South Naknek and Brevig Mission.