

Howard Rock's legacy and the Tundra Times: proud past; what future?

When Howard Rock founded the Tundra Times in 1962, he described this newspaper's mission as follows:

"It will be the medium to air the views of Native organizations. It will reflect their policies and work for the betterment of the Native people of Alaska. It will reflect their aims...their hopes. It will strive to aid them in their struggle for just determination and settlement of their enormous problems.

"Second, it will strive to provide information on matters of interest to all Natives of Alaska, whether they be Eskimos of the Arctic, the Athabascans of the Interior, and other Indians and Aleuts of the Aleutian Islands."

In the 18 years since those words were written, the face of Alaska has changed dramatically. Alaska Natives have made great strides forward. Yet many of the same problems which Howard Rock foresaw are still with us.

Over the years, the Tundra Times has done its best to chronicle the events which have affected Alaska's Natives. Our goals today are the same goals that Howard Rock set forth in that first editorial.

Times have not always been easy. Most people are aware of the financial ailments the Tundra Times has grappled with over the years. Without the selfless dedication of staff members who have been committed to those goals, the Tundra Times might have died long ago.

Today, the Tundra Times has reached a turning point. The newspaper you hold in your hands is something new.

Some of the changes are obvious. We have adopted a new graphic style to give the paper a fresh, clean look. And as you look through the paper, you'll notice that the articles have been arranged into sections for easier reading.

But above all, we've attempted to re-examine our mission. Is the Tundra Times relevant? Can we provide something of value to our readers? Is it worth the trouble?

We've come to the following conclusion.

The answer is a qualified yes. The Tundra Times is worth the time and trouble only if it adequately serves the Native people of this state.

In order to do that, we must be prepared to take hard looks at the problems and issues facing this state, with a special emphasis on how Alaska Natives are affected. We must evaluate our political and corporate leaders. And if what we find is not always flattering, we must have the courage to print what we know in the belief that the interests of Native people are best served by openness and full disclosure.

The Tundra Times must also serve as the editorial voice of Alaska's Native people. We must stand together on the issues and take positions of unity. We must provide editorial space for letters and opinions reflecting diversity within the Native community.

Politically, Howard Rock set the editorial guidelines for this newspaper. In his words, "The Tundra Times will not support any political party. Its policy will be independent. Occasionally, the paper in its editorial columns may favor a candidate or elected official. If this occurs, it will be because of his stand on Native issues rather than his political party."

We believe that the Tundra Times can play an important role in the future of Alaska's Natives just as it did under Howard Rock in the past. We believe that the state's other newspapers do a poor job of reporting on Native issues, and that this reporting is the legitimate concern of the Tundra Times.

To do this, we need your support. In Howard Rock's words, "We hope not for any distinction, but to serve with dedication the truthful presentation of Native problems, issues and interests. The paper asks your fine reception and wishes for success."

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