

Barrow village corporation sues former attorney

Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corp. has sued Fairbanks lawyer Ed Merdes claiming Merdes violated legal ethics by representing the village corporation and the Arctic Slope Regional Corp. in the boundary negotiations with the U.S. government.

The legal malpractice suit claims Merdes' negotiations benefited the regional corporation at the expense of the Barrow village corporation. The village corporation claimed as a result of the negotiations the village gave up its right to control oil and gas exploration on its own lands in National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. And, it further claimed the regional corporation gained rights and titles to land it would not otherwise hold.

Village lawyers claim Merdes and the regional corporation which acts as trustee to the village, misled village officials.

Merdes' attorney say the suit is without basis. However, federal Judge James von der Heydt las December ordered Merdes to withdraw as an attorney in a dispute between the Native corporations over how much money each is to receive from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.