

In Arctic Village, even Santa gets a present

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

ARCTIC VILLAGE — Cold 35-below-zero winter weather, didn't stop people here from coming to meet the Air Force C-130 aircraft and the man they were all waiting to see, Santa Claus.

It all began 21 years ago when the Air Force first flew in to help the people of this small village, located almost 200 miles north of Fairbanks.

There was a huge forest fire in 1965, and as a result the Porcupine Caribou Herd changed its migratory path away from the village. The

villagers depend on caribou meat as their main source of food to survive.

They asked the Air Force for help and for the next few years the Air Force continued to help the villagers hunt until eventually the caribou resumed their regular migratory path.

Today the Air Force flies in supplies for the villagers and during the Christmas season they fly in Santa Claus who gives presents to each resident, both young and old.

To make this all possible for the villagers there are fund-raisers and donations through The Firebirds and

(Continued on Page Five)

• Cold weather doesn't deter villagers

(Continued from Page One)

the Elmendorf Officers' Wives Club and local community donations.

Kias Peter Jr., 24, said that Santa has been coming with gifts since he was 3 years old. Now he enjoys watching all the young children open their gifts and talk with Santa.

The village dance group, which has won two first-place awards at the World Eskimo Indian Olympics, danced for their guests before Santa handed out gifts.

The villagers hosted a giant feast with caribou, fry bread and different types of salads. To rid the chill there were huge pots of coffee and tea.

Adeline Raboff said the people here call themselves *Neetsaiigwitchin*, "people from the far side." And she explained how a long time ago the people, traditionally nomadic, would follow the Porcupine Caribou Herd as

Adeline Raboff said the people here call themselves Neetsaiigwitchin, 'people from the far side.'

far as Ft. McPherson in northwestern Canada.

"In the winter the people would live in the woods and in the spring and fall they would all congregate," — about eight different groups, Raboff said. "Traditionally we would hunt sheep in August through October.

Sometimes we would go to McGrath, but most of the time we would go to Arctic Village where there was a group of our caches.

"The people in Arctic Village are made up of two clan groups called *Nutsaii* and *Ch'etsya*. You would

carry the clan name of your mother and marry into the other clan," she said.

"Everyone over 50 can speak the Native language, but most 26-year-olds and younger cannot," Raboff said.

"In 1908-1921 it started becoming more of a community, when Albert Tritt built the church," Raboff said.

Sarah James, a village council representative, and her mother, Martha James who is 81, presented the 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron with a caribou hide on which various resident artists depicted the history of the village from the year 1955 to present.

Even Santa Claus got presents. The villagers gave him caribou antlers, beaded bookmarkers and earrings.

The event concluded when Santa took the lead in singing the song "We wish you a merry Christmas."