

Gravel's Receptionist Flora to Vie in Cherry Blossom Festival

By GINGER ROGERS

WASHINGTON D.C.—Flora Bergman may be the only Athabaskan Indian in Washington D.C., but she loves it. Since October, she's been the receptionist for the office of Senator Mike Gravel.

"It's fantastic," she says, bubbling over, "I've met so many people—there's so much to learn; about politics, the country, everything."

Twenty-year-old Flora answers the phones, greets all the visitors. She's a favorite of the staffers, the local policemen and everyone else who comes within glimpse of her enthusiastic smile.

Just recently she was named the Cherry Blossom Princess of Alaska and will join in with other state princesses in Washington's annual Cherry Blossom Festival this spring.

As for her boss, Flora has no complaints.

"Senator Gravel is great . . . so easygoing . . . doesn't get frantic. He's very thoughtful and considerate."

One thing Flora does miss is Alaska's cold weather. While local Washingtonians shiver in the 20 above temperature, Flora says it's too hot. Around this time back home in Allakaket, it's 80 below . . . just about right.

In addition, while she loves the excitement of Washington, she misses the closeness of the folks back home. But she'll return home in April, to work on a nursing degree, and be back with her eleven brothers and sisters.

"Politics is interesting, but I really want to be a nurse," she says. "The nearest hospital to my home is over an hour away . . . we need that kind of help closer."

And besides, she adds with finality, "Alaska's my home."