

# School teaches modern skills for traditional hunts

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Inside the just-opened vocational high school in Kotzebue, a young boy approaches Janet Barr with a problem. In his hands he holds an ulu knife and some sheep skin which he hopes to convert into mittens. Patiently, Barr shows him how to work the ulu, and how to best cut the skin. He returns to his seat and a group of girls gathered around a small table call Barr over for a bit of help.

Janet Barr doesn't have an educator's degree, but she is teaching Inupiat youth in much the same way as her forebears have since time immemorial. The main difference is that she is working inside a classroom, rather than from a sod igloo or under the great Arctic sky.

Elsewhere in the building, students make harpoons, dog sleds, work on automobiles and small machines, and hone typ-

"I just started, this is my first year," Barr explains. To an outside observer, she looks like a pro. Barr expertly gives the students the help which they freely seek. She enjoys her work.

"It's important that these students learn how to sew," Barr explains, "so they will learn their culture." It was not that long ago that a scene such as this could not have taken place inside a public school in Kotzebue.

"What we're trying to do here is to have the school district meet the needs of the students, rather than having the students meet the needs of the district," explains John Creed, director of communications. "Historically, the western education system tried to mold the Inupiat people for its own purposes."

In 1976, a senate bill was passed which called for an end to discrimination, and which was intended to give Native

people a greater say in their own education. This, says

Creed, was the time things began to change in the Northwest Arctic.

Parents and students began to make demands of what they expected education to do for them. They mandated that

their school district meet basic educational needs. In the Arctic this included not only reading, writing, science and math, but also technical and

(Continued on Page Seven)



The staff of the Inupiaq Materials Development Center with some of their work. Left to right: Myra Jones, Paul Ongtooguk, Carol Richards, Robert Mulluk, Jr., Susie Sun and Rachael Craig.

# Vocational skills

(Continued from Page Six)

subsistence skills.

Many new programs have been and are being implemented to meet these demands. A support center has been established to meet the special needs, such as the printing of new materials needed to teach Inupiaq, of a remote, Arctic district.

High among the priorities of the Arctic people was a vocational high school; a place where a student could learn to fix an automobile, wire an electric circuit, and gain subsistence skills.

"The school district has emphasized vocational and technical education as much as possible," Creed claims, "in a way that complements the subsistence lifestyle. Kids here have been riding snow machines since they were four. The snow machines have been breaking down since they were four. They need to know how to fix them." Students from the outlying villages will be brought in for two to four week sessions, Creed says, when they will work in the new facilities.