

'Chief of Everything' Hoffman won't be kept down

by Louise Sagmoen

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Even a hospital bed couldn't keep Eddie "Chief of Everything" Hoffman down. Leaping out of his chair he bellowed at Steve Kakaruk, *Tundra Times* reporter, "You! you cut your hair."

Along with offering his views on fashion the crewcut-headed chief spoke about land, his 35-year political career and a little bit about himself.

As a young boy in Nightmute Eddie didn't have to deal with boundaries but by the time he turned 54 years old regional corporate boundaries had been developed. Today he doesn't have faith in the regional corporations' ability to hold on to the land.

"The villages (should) have their own land instead of (the) corporation. I don't believe in the corporation because they'll be bought and then people of the village won't have say. I don't like that. The villages should have say-so because they're land owners." In offering an alternative the chief said, "The IRA (Indian Reorganization Act) villages, turn it over to them...no power to sell that land. I'm all for that."

One of Alaska's stronger advocates for village land control is the Southwest non-profit arm of Calista, the Association of Village Council Presidents. Hoffman is a board member of AVCP along with traditional chief of the organization. He claims that's also where he got his 'everything' title. "Well I'll tell you, couple years ago at a meeting, 56 villages voted me for all the villages," he replied when asked how he got the title.

But after spending 35 years in politics he's accumulated more titles than those gained at AVCP. He's

served on the Bethel City Council for 23 years, the KYUK television-radio station board of directors and the Calista regional corporation board since the '70's.

But he spoke about his city council service the most. When asked how long he'd been with the city council he said, "Twenty-three years. That's pretty long. Nobody fired me. I just quit. The rest wouldn't take no action." Before leaving Bethel's city council he accomplished his task. "I get it (elected) to kick some people out. I told Tony, I sez you and what the heck they call 'em has got to go. They was spending too much money." Later "you and what the heck they call 'em" resigned from the city.

In between attending Calista, AVCP, KYUK and city council meetings Eddie still has time to run his fuel company and to fish during the summer season. As a result of his fishing which his wife, Bessie said he didn't have to be doing, he was hospitalized for approximately two months.

"Sometime in July we were out commercial fishing and it was dark cloudy night and it got dark quick. I thought I was going in the main channel. I missed (the main channel) about ten feet and I plowed through the mud," he said describing the accident when he broke a disc in his back.

When Eddie isn't fishing he's keeping track of the fuel company. "I got six oil trucks running steady all the time," he said.

It's not exactly clear what came first, Eddie or the city of Bethel. He can trace his family back to 1882 when his grandfather arrived and then disappeared in 1932. "I was born in Nightmute. My grandfather was the first whiteman in Bethel. Trader Lind

they called him. He came 1882. Come up the Kuskokwim River then he built a store there and later on he gave his two daughters a store a piece."

He lived in Nightmute after he was born there April 4, 1917. "I moved to Bethel in 1938. Where I lived upriver no work. If you did any work you gotta get away from home. Work was at Nyak and Marvel Creek."

According to Eddie there were 18 children in his family. Today two brothers and five sisters are alive. His brother George lives in Aniak; Charles lives in Bethel. Among his sisters are

Elsie Miller of Anchorage; Kathrine Lee of Aniak; Bertha Stevens of Bethel; Agnes Charles of Aniak and Lucy Hoffman of Anchorage. His children also populate various parts of the state. His oldest son is Eddie, Jr. followed by Stanley, Richard, Sally Charles, Margaret Hoffman, Robert and Gregory.

Speaking with a smile he told about two of his grandchildren. "We make a fisherman out of Stosh." There's also Stosh's brother Willie. "He called up last night, yeah Willie did. He said they went out for willow grouse."



Eddie "Chief of Everything" Hoffman, shortly before leaving Providence Hospital in Anchorage.
photo by Steve Kakaruk