

Roustabout training for villagers working well

After a full year in operation, Alaska United Drilling Corporation's roustabout training program for Inupiat Eskimos has been expanded to provide opportunities in higher paying professional positions for shareholders in three of the state's Alaska Native regional corporations.

The ownership of Alaska United Drilling, Alaska's only locally owned oil drilling firm, was expanded this year with the participation of the Bristol Bay Native Corp. and the Sealaska Corp.

The training program began in 1980 when Alaska United assembled two drilling rigs in Anchorage prior to trucking

them to Prudhoe Bay where they are now in service. Since the drilling rigs have openings for workmen in a variety of trades and at a broad range of skill levels, the firm decided to train NANA shareholders for roustabout, or beginner's level, jobs. Nine men have successfully completed training.

Following an eight-week training course in Oilfield Technology at the Seward Skill Center, the trainees transferred to Anchorage where they assembled and disassembled the new drill rigs. They joined the first crews on the rigs at Prudhoe Bay a few weeks later.

"Since then," said Dallas Cross, personnel manager for Alaska United, "the men have been impressing almost everyone they've come in contact with."

"They worked so well that almost as soon as they got on the job, they were ready to take on more complicated work," he added.

In June, 1981, Alaska United President Robert McCleskey approved a suggestion that the trainee program be expanded to include the more demanding tasks of the drilling floor.

Roustabouts in an oil field can roughly be compared to laborers on a construction project. Floormen on a drilling

rig are in more specialized positions, actually operating the drilling machinery and taking responsibility for the progress of the drilling work. At Prudhoe, that means almost three miles of pipe every time a well is drilled into America's largest proven oil reservoir.

The work is hard, fast and dangerous. It also pays well. Roustabout trainees earn \$513.93 an hour, working two-weeks on and two-weeks off in 12-hour shifts. Most of them can expect to make \$40,000 a year. Trainees on the drilling floor can expect to make 25 percent more.

The changes in lifestyle that working in the Prudhoe Bay

oil patch has brought to the men of Northwestern Alaska has been measurable, according to company officials.

Two weeks on the job and one, or two weeks off means they still can participate in the activities which form a major part of their cultural background. A primary activity is hunting for the winter meat supply.

"It's a pretty good job," said Alfred Gregg of Kotzebue as he and a roustabout trainee rolled a 30-foot long section of well casing into position on the pipe storage level of the drilling rig. Gregg had been a lineman in Kotzebue, working odd hours and not looking forward to much of a future in the job-scarce area.

A huge forklift carrying four sections of well casing drove up to the end of the pipe room. The operator, another trainee, tipped the forks and the four tons of pipe crashed onto a pair of skids. Gregg began rolling his end toward the waiting stack. "We just got through work with the production pipe," he said.

"I never dreamed that there were so many different kinds of pipe," he added as a broad smile spread slowly across his face. "Sometimes I dream about the stuff."

The training program for Gregg was easy. After only two weeks on-the-job, he was promoted to the lead roustabout position. Thanks to the training program, he'll have a crack at higher wages on the drill floor.