

Individuals, Corporations join to fund rural hospital

Stories of communities searching to make up for lost federal funding are common these days. But not so common is the story of the residents of Alaska's sparsely populated Copper River Basin (200 miles east of Anchorage). These 2,000 Alaskans have already contributed more than \$55,000 to an \$800,000 expansion project for their local hospital.

And, they have made it clear they don't even want federal funding. "We don't want to be

linked to any federal money and the ties that it involves," said Bob Sunder, committee chairman of the local expansion fund. Sunder, a Copper Basin businessman, is supported by the many other community members who have helped in the fund-raising efforts. The effort has even extended to the local school students who are in the midst of trying to raise one million and one pennies for the project.

The Copper Basin residents take special pride in their privately operated six-bed hospital. It has served the area for more than 25 years. And it is the only such facility in an area the size of the state of Ohio. The hospital is run by Central Alaskan Missions, a non-profit, non-denominational mission organization. Patients come from as far as 200 miles away and have arrived in everything from snow-machines to helicopters.

The committee has realized that it cannot hope to raise locally the \$800,000 needed for the total expansion but they do hope that their enthusiasm for the project will encourage others to become involved. Ralph Guenther is heading the hospital's state-wide and national fund-raising efforts. In his words, "The local support is very encouraging. We're mentioning this in our approach to some of the charitable foundations because if they don't see any local interest, it's unlikely they'll become interested in the project."

The local committee has taken an unusual approach in its local efforts. "We've tried to raise money for expansion while having fun at the same time," said Sunder.

The fun has included benefit dinners at local lodges as well as auctions, fleamarkets and bake sales. The Basin Lions Club donated money from an air show while the state troopers held a basketball tournament with all proceeds going to the expansion. Private donations, including a \$10,000 gift from Ahtna, the local Native corporation, have also boosted the total.

Earlier, more than 40 residents took part in a 26-mile walk-a-thon for the hospital. Although not everyone fin-

ished, the participants, who ranged in age from 4 to 68, earned more than \$5,000 for the project.

Recently, an auction on the local radio station brought in more than \$7,500. Everything from homemade bread to handmade quilts was donated and then auctioned off. Friendly bidding among neighbors even pushed the price of a pecan pie to \$55! A painting by Copper Center artist Jeanne Sunder brought in \$310.

The spotlight is now on the local school students who are trying to raise a million and one pennies for the hospital (\$10,000.01). According to Glennallen High School student body president Rusty Finch, "We're hoping to get pennies from around the country." For convenience, the students are taking the donations in any form and will convert them to pennies later. Their address is: Million & One for Faith, Glennallen School, Glennallen, AK 99588.

Even with all the local activity, Guenther says the hospital needs much more funding if they want to begin building on schedule next spring. But, in his words, "if we receive the kind of support from others that we've received from the local communities, we'll be underway for sure next spring."