

Tyonek Villagers realize housing dream

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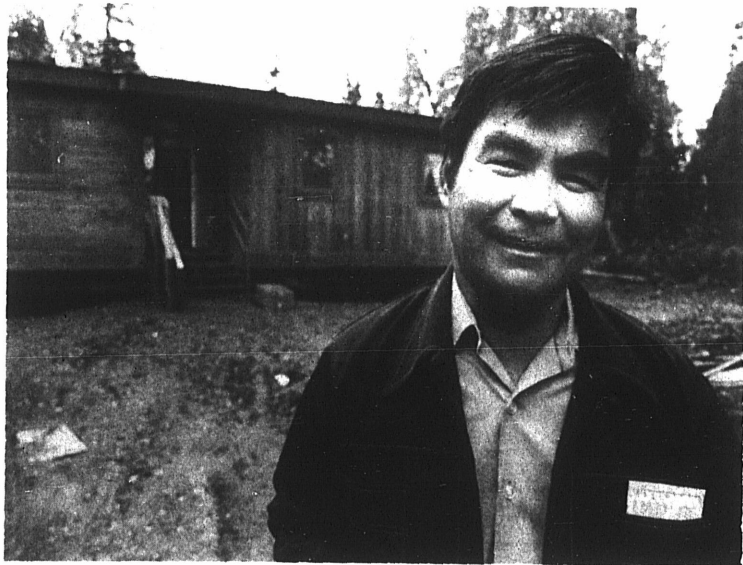
Sometimes it takes years to have a dream fulfilled, and sometimes a dream must be reluctantly shelved. The dream of Tyonek village, more than ten years in the making, was finally fulfilled in the fall of 1979.

September 18 served as Moving Day for 93 villagers, almost half of Tyonek's population. According to Bonnie McCord, the village council president, the move to 27 new homes, located a quarter-mile from the village center, means "the village has finally seen a dream come true."

Situated across the inlet from Anchorage, accessible by plane or barge, Tyonek is on the upswing. While an old housing project represents past frustrations, the new cedar-sided homes are the outcome of persistent effort expended by many Alaskans, villagers and outsiders alike.

Emil McCord, the man officials and Tyonek residents look to to praise and to act as spokesman, is modest and quiet. A village resident for all but three of his 46 years, McCord has been plugging away for more than a decade to acquire much-needed housing. The long years and many letters that McCord and others chalked-up finally produced a 19-acre wooded development, a home.

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Village leader Emil McCord pushed for decent housing for over a decade before the new units were dedicated last Friday.

● Tyonek village housing dream comes true

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Ultimately, the \$2,250,000 project was funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development under the Indian Mutual Help Fund. Locally, Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA) tax-exempt bonds funded the project. The families will pay 25 percent of monthly income to CIHA to pay-off the 25-year Morgan Trust mortgages.

The near future looks bright, but the process of attaining funding was laced with bureaucracy and back-tracking.

McCord states: "In 1964-65 I worked on the council and was needed in the (first) new housing project we got through oil company monies. After housing started, Tyonek people started moving home. The village council appointed me to look into the needs. Four years ago I was appointed by the council to look into (more) housing."

The population had dwindled, according to McCord, from a 1960 population of a little over 200, to roughly 105 during the early 60's. Still, additional housing was needed even though "not

enough people had returned home."

Finally, McCord recounts, "the real effort began four years ago." He connected with the CIHA, which acts as both a public housing and Indian housing authority. Negotiations began with Larry Eckels, Executive Director of the CIHA, and with Max Dolchok, the chairman of the CIHA Board of Commissioners, after the CIHA was re-activated.

McCord highly praises their efforts: "From the time Larry and Max started working, the wheels started turning. They really cared, and put their hearts in it." With the guidance of the CIHA, the last intense four years of effort, 1975-1979, culminated in open house ceremonies on Friday, September 14.

Michael Jones of the project's architectural firm, Habitat North, stated that they did not go to "the village with plans they had to have, unlike past years. The people were consulted on how they live, and what they do with space."

The results are impressive. Few trees were cut. Streets con-



HOMES BLEND INTO NATURAL BEAUTY OF TYONEK VILLAGE

form to the topography. A storage room was designed. Wood/coal-burning stoves were installed, with a supplemental back-up oil heating system. This will keep cost and utilization at a minimum. Insulation was foamed-in. The walls were built from the inside-out.

Don Smith, employed with HUD, stressed that the Tyonek housing program represents a "milestone in the development of Native housing in Alaska."

But for Emil McCord and his family and friends, the 27 homes

have a more personal meaning. When asked what he hopes the housing may do for the village, he reflected and then spoke: "For one thing, I hope it will reunite our people. There was really a tremendous amount of pressure to get new housing. Our kids will not be crowded-up in another house--no more worries about where they're going to stay next--they've got their own home."

He added, after a moment of reflection, "I don't know what you would call it--more self-respect, more determination to work and hold jobs (may be the

offshoots of the new project) Picking up momentum, he revealed more dreams. He wants "our people to move back home. We're not going to stop here, we're going to apply for more housing. We hope more people will come back home." And according to Agnes Brown, President of the Tyonek Native Corporation, which donated 19 acres of land to the project, at least three families are moving to Tyonek from Anchorage.

Tyonek is gathering strength and numbers; and for a close-knit group of Indians, it is 'home.'