

# Research lab modest but vitally important

Compared to the Naval Arctic Research Laboratories a few miles north, the North Slope Borough's new scientific research laboratory in Browerville looks very modest, but right now the Borough's research lab means a lot more to the scientific community than NARL, simply because the Borough's lab is open and NARL is closed.

Mayor Brower recognized that at the worst possible time the federal government took away all the science facilities on the North Slope," says North Slope Borough Environmental Protection Office Researcher Ray Dronenburg. "The new facility meets a desperate need."

As an example, Dronenburg cites the recent visit of a Dr. Erich Follman.

"Dr. Follman is studying rabies which is of critical concern to the people of the North Slope. He came up to examine fox carcasses. He would have had no other place to do this before. Now, we have a research facility which can respond to the needs of the scientific community."

Even on-going attempts to reopen NARL do not detract from the immediate importance of the Borough's research lab. Dronenburg points out that while the NARL question drags on other

decisions are being pushed through, like increased oil drilling and seismic testing in the Beaufort Sea.

Meanwhile, only the Borough seems willing to commit resources to studying the consequences of such decisions.

Dronenburg is proud of the Borough facility but admits that due to the cost of laboratory equipment it may be awhile before it is completely stocked.

He says the Borough has applied for equipment from NARL but while they wait, "It doesn't make you feel good to know you're going without equipment that is setting a few miles north gathering dust. They have a full X-ray lab at NARL but we can't touch it. It's there but its unavailable."

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game has expressed a great interest in obtaining a permanent place within the lab, from which they can conduct many of their on-going projects that involve the North Slope Borough and its resources. The University of Alaska also has shown interest in using the lab.

"We had a doctor call and ask if it would be possible to use the laboratory for a logistics base while conducting research on the

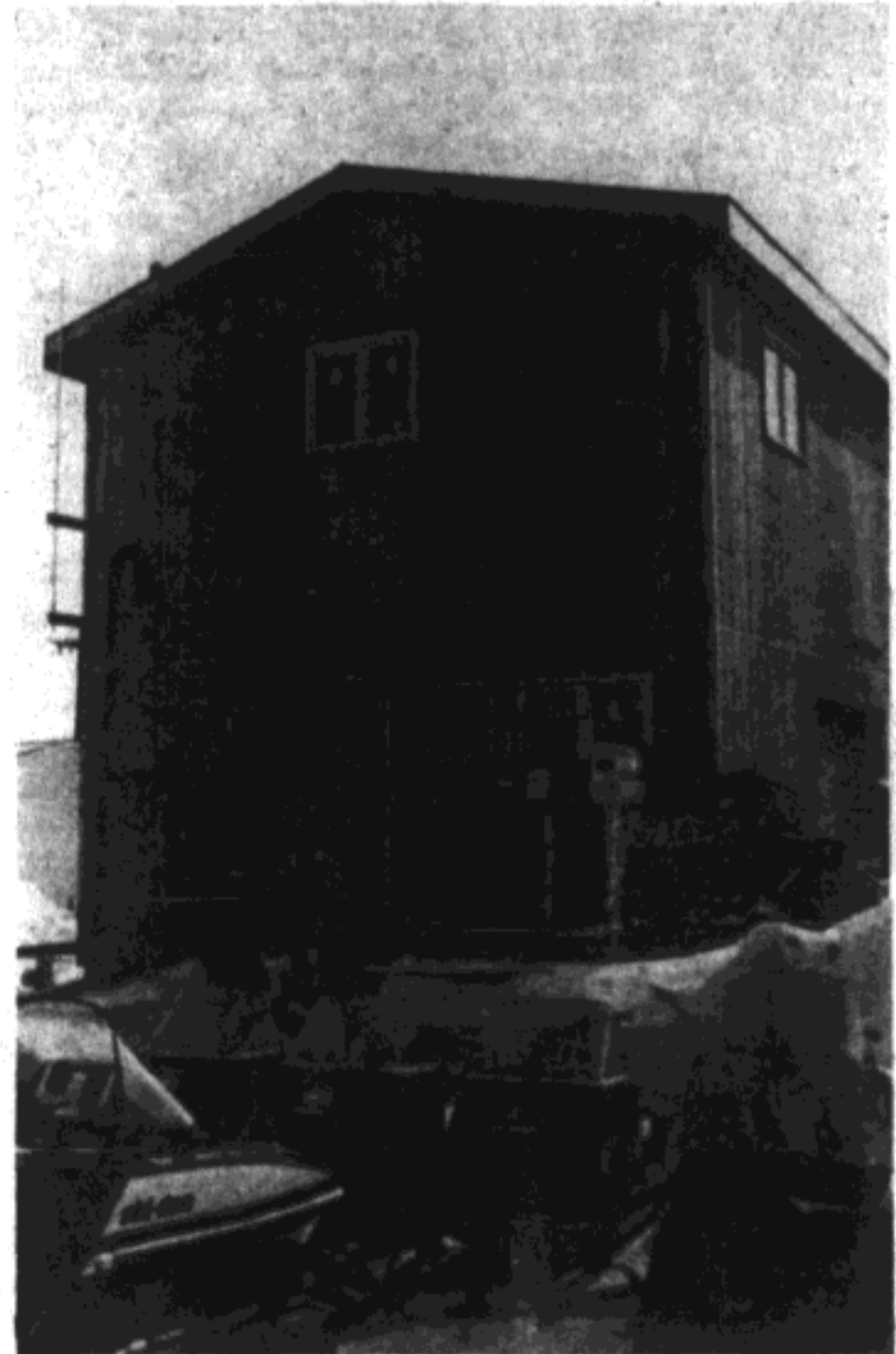
birds which inhabit the Slope. He would have to bring three incubators with him in order to do so and stated that he was willing to donate the incubators to the lab in exchange for the privilege of using it," says the EPO researcher.

The Borough's Environmental Protection Office will be responsible for operating the lab under the direction of Dr. Tom Albert, Science Advisor.

Dr. Albert will be using the lab himself as a base of operations as well as a number of visiting scientists. In addition to the Borough's Whale Census and Inupiat Marine Science Training Program is now using the facility as a logistics base.

The Borough's Environmental Protection Office will be responsible for operating the new research facility. It was completed early this year and already has seen heavy use. Besides a number of visiting scientists, it provides a base of operations for North Slope Borough Science Advisor Dr. Tom Albert.

So it may look small compared to NARL but measuring by present activity and importance, the new North Slope Borough Research Laboratory takes on monumental proportions.



The new research center in Barrow operated by the North Slope Borough Environmental Protection office offers the only on-site laboratory for Arctic research since the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory closed.