

# ASRC relieved as attorney back on ground

Oliver Leavitt, one of the vice-presidents for the Arctic Slope Regional Corp., has jokingly complained for the past few months about the hobbies indulged in by ASRC's attorney.

That complaint is well founded if you believe in keeping your employees safe.

Attorney Jim Wickwire just returned from a three-month assault on the highest moun-

tain in the world — 29,000-foot high Mount Everest in the Himalayas.

Wickwire has been attorney for ASRC since 1969, before the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act passed and his passion for climbing tall mountains has never made ASRC people happy.

His climbing preceded his association with ASRC by nine years and the Seattle-based

attorney has been scaling mountains since 1960.

His most recent ascent had been in the planning state for more than two years.

The Wickwire team went on the North Face of Everest on a new route over the Great Couloir, which means Great Gully in French.

The three-month climb took four men of the team to the Camp 6 level of 26,500 feet. To do that, they had to transport tons of food with them to each base camp to be consumed at a rate of two pounds of freeze dried food per day per person.

Wickwire said the team was originally scheduled to make a fall assault on the mountain but, on a preparatory trip to the area, was given permission to make their climb in spring.

Summer assaults aren't tried because of the monsoon season which brings bad blizzards.

Wickwire said the team was making good progress despite bad weather and was aiming at reaching the summit by May

10 to beat the monsoons. However, Camp 6 wasn't established until May 15, which put the team in rougher weather.

Four people were scheduled to make the climb from Camp 6 on May 16 when a tragic accident befell the group.

Wickwire and Marti Hoey, a woman climber whom Wickwire characterized as a "conservative, careful climber," were preparing to follow two other climbers up a steep wall using ropes, when Hoey stepped back and, for some reason her belt harness opened and she fell.

Wickwire said the woman fell down a 45-degree incline and was unable to grab a rope trailing partway down the incline. She fell 6,000 feet to her death.

Wickwire said, "She stood up to allow me to put my pack on . . . she stepped back and her harness opened. She couldn't catch the rope. There was no hope at all. I immediately knew the consequences of the fall."

Wickwire said there was no

thought of continuing the climb that day and the others returned to Camp 6. One man tried a solo climb to the top the next day but only made it to the 27,500 foot level. The group then retreated further down the mountain.

The last attempt was made on May 24 when Wickwire and fellow climber Dave Mahre tried to make the climb but only made it to the 25,000-foot level.

Then, the monsoon began and the expedition was forced to withdraw.

The "challenge of doing something different and the satisfaction I get from being able to do something different," is what makes Wickwire climb, he says.

"There is also the risk factor involved. This is no death wish," says Wickwire. "It's more of an affirmation of life."

"You come to appreciate life so much more when you challenge it. There are so many things you take for granted."

He says a climb is as much a mental as a physical challenge.

"You've got to be able to handle the fear that is there . . . that should be there, and keep it under control."

And, there is fear, says Wickwire. "I think we are all terrified of it. I don't think there is anybody who climbs who doesn't have some fear but you learn to deal with the height and the exposure . . . the hanging out there on an exposed face."