

NANA shareholders host Sealaska

Visit from Tlingits stresses need for Native unity

BY MARGIE BAUMAN

KOTZEBUE—Shareholders of NANA Regional Corporation, concerned over possible effects on subsistence, have voted "no" once again to mineral exploration and development in Northwest Alaska.

But the margin of opposition at NANA's annual meeting here March 20 was considerably narrowed from the previous year and there were some quiet predictions from some observers that next year the tide might turn in favor of such ventures.

"Your board of directors and staff are NOT taking a position on this; it's up to you," NANA President John W. Schaeffer told shareholders packed into the Kotzebue School gymnasium. "You've made subsistence your number one priority and we won't allow mineral development on NANA lands until you want us to."

Schaeffer did advise the shareholders, however, that NANA has had a continuous stream of offers from mining companies. And in response to protests from one shareholder that miners would cause permanent damage to the land, Schaeffer said, "We'd make sure that any miners or whoever else came in cleaned up any mess that they made, if we allowed them to come in."

Mineral development, especially as it might affect subsistence, was discussed at length, with Robert Newlin, chairman of the board, translating portions of the discussion into Inupiat.

Sealaska Visitors

NANA shareholders found a sympathetic ear and much support forthcoming from visitors from the Sealaska Corp. and Yak-tat Kwaan, Inc., village corporation for Yakutat. Led by Byron Mallott, chairman of the board of Sealaska and president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc., they came at their own expense to observe the NANA meeting and discuss mutual interests.

"Sealaska has some 16,000 shareholders and village shareholders are in the numerical

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York Wilson Sr., left, with Fletcher Gregg and Jennifer Ipalook at the recent NANA Annual meeting in Kotzebue. Photo by Margie Bauman.

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minority in our corporation," Mallott said. "But there is still a very strong sense that (subsistence) is an issue we must be sensitive to." As president of AFN, Mallott has maintained a strong stand for subsistence rights.

"Most of our cultures, no matter how different are based on fish and game that the land provides," added Schaeffer.

"Our (Inupiat) history, our culture, isn't written in books yet...if they take it (subsistence) away from us, we'll starve. Our headquarters are right in the village and our people are village people. We've got to preserve and protect our culture."

The majority of NANA's nearly 5,000 shareholders still live in Northwest Alaska and subsistence has significant economic and cultural meaning to them.

Came to Learn

"Of all the Native corporations in the state, the corporation with the best reputation for being sensitive to the needs of its shareholders is NANA," Mallott said. What the Sealaska folks wanted to learn, is how they do it, he said.

The Southeastern Tlingits and Haidas also came to discuss mutual interests in holding the government to promises made in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and in potential business ventures. "Over the years,

the greatest support for Native corporations is going to come from other Native corporations, so let us sit down together..." Mallott said, "We've got common concerns; issues that affect

John Schaeffer will be president," he added with a grin. The NANA board later decided to play along with Lang's rumor mill and voted against passing a measure not to merge with the

occasion with representatives of the old Northwest Alaska Native Association, like Mary and John Schaeffer, Willie Hensley and State Sen. Frank Ferguson and Robert Newlin. Today all of them sit in positions of economic, social and political influence and they are more concerned than ever with working together.

In response to questions from Sealaska, Schaeffer discussed some NANA methods for maintaining a cohesive community of shareholders.

He pointed to the elders conference, a cooperative venture with Mauneluk, Inc., as an example. "When the missionaries and the BIA came in, they kind of wiped out our leadership, so we had to bring in young people," Schaeffer said.

"Now we are telling them (the elders) to get involved again.

"When push comes to shove, when an elder speaks, we listen. They can wipe any of us out in this area, if they want. The people won't listen to a younger person, if the elders get together," he said.

This year, NANA helped the elders conference, a semi-annual gathering of the elders to record their history, to get incorporated.

"We've had very few old people die since we started this," Schaeffer told the Southeasterns. "Maybe we're giving them something to live for.

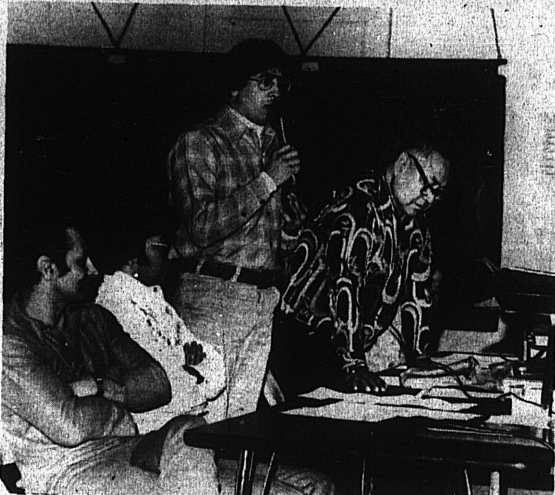
They have so much knowledge, so much presence, that we want them involved."

One of NANA's best known elders is Chester Seveck, leader of the Kotzebue Eskimo Dancers and the author of the book, "Longest Reindeer Herder." With his wife Helen in the audience, cheering him on, Chester Seveck was presented NANA's 1978 Stockholder of the Year award. Helen Seveck is also a member of the dance troupe and with Chester has worked as an official Eskimo greeter of tourists in summer months to Northwest Alaska.

NANA presented Seveck with "a piece of our rock," an award made of jade from NANA's Jade Mountain Enterprises.

NANA Board election results also showed shareholder satisfaction, as Harriet Blair (Ambler), Raymond Lee (Buckland), Christina Westlake (Kiana), David Swan (Kivalina), Merna Cleveland (Kobuk), and Marjorie Baker (Kotzebue), were reelected to three year terms. Delores Barr (Deering) was elected to fill the seat vacated when Emerson Moto (Deering) decided not to seek reelection. Seven of NANA's board seats were up for reelection.

In a board meeting following the annual meeting, Robert Newlin was reelected chairman of the board and John W. Schaeffer was reconfirmed as president of the company.



Left to Right, John W. Schaeffer, Willie Hensley, Byron Mallott, and Robert Newlin at NANA annual meeting. Photo by Margie Bauman.

all of us."

In the spirit of comaraderie, Sealaska board member Roger Lang added that "for once the Indians and Eskimos are getting together and there's NOT a crisis."

"It's NOT true that NANA and Sealaska Corp. are going to merge and it's not true that

Sealaska Corp.

A Milestone

The presence of Mallott, Lang and other Sealaska representatives at the NANA meeting marked a milestone, of sorts, in the land claims movement. Not many years ago they were working through the fledgling AFN, meeting only on