

Program looks for leaders

by Louise Donhauser

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It's called the Alaska Native Leadership Project but former students see it as "... learning about the issues that are possible threats to our people," or giving a "headstart for people who are interested in the fight for the present issues that effect our people and their cultures."

The ANLP will be looking for another group of potential leaders who want to learn about Native issues or get a headstart when it begins recruitment August, 1984 for the upcoming sessions.

The program sponsored by the Alaska Federation of Natives, is conducted in four separate sessions which include Individual Awareness, Management Skill Building, State Government and Alaska Native Issues. The week-long sessions will be conducted in November, 1984; January, 1985; March 1985; and the final session, Alaska Native Issues, hasn't been scheduled yet.

Each session is conducted in a different location, with the first one being held in a rural retreat, the second one in Anchorage, the third in Juneau. The final session will be conducted in rural Alaska.

The leadership project is a state-funded program with a \$250,000 appropriation for the 1984-85 session. Travel, lodging, and fees are paid for by ANLP.

During the last session, 125 applications were received and eventually 19 were accepted and 16 graduated. Applicants are selected on the basis of demonstrated interest, community awareness and leadership potential.

The program began in 1980 and since its inception 60 people representing 39 communities have completed the program. Many of the graduates are now involved in various aspects of Native government.

Some of last years participants told why the program was significant in essays.

Rose Abraham said the program taught her about the governmental process which could later be used to help her people.

"Having the opportunity to learn about the legislative process and meeting with the government officials will always be valuable to me in education. My fears of the government subsided, the process became clear to me.

"Through the activities and people I met I have gained a desire to practice my citizenship and rights, as a human being become more involved in the happenings of government."

She added, "The fourth session brought to light a part of the reason for my purpose. Learning about the issues that were and are possible threats to our people has brought conviction to me to do more of what I can to help clear a trail for those yet to come."

Iliamna resident Gregory Anelon felt he could use the knowledge he gained when he returned to his village.

Anelon said, "I can't tell you how much of an importance the project will be in the future of our fight for Sovereignty. This project will give a headstart for people who are interested in the fight for the present issues that effect our

people and their cultures."

Vicki Sheldon felt the program instilled a unity among Alaskan Natives and the program also reinforced the identity of Alaska Natives.

"The Alaska Native Leadership Project has been very beneficial for me. It has opened my eyes to the tremendous need for good Native Leaders with so many big changes, and such pressing issues, we cannot keep the things we hold dear to us.

"Our culture, language and our way of life, these are all necessary for Native People to survive. This is our self identity, what makes a unique people. We need to support each other and work together in Unity."

Another student, Jaqueline Hill felt she had gained significant knowledge.

"There's no words, or there's

not enough in the English language, that I can use to explain what I've experienced during these sessions. ANLP can and has become very personal to me. When I go home after each session I try to explain, especially to my husband what I have experienced but I can't.

"I know they (people) will realize what my experience was by the effort I make to put the knowledge I've gained to use. I guess you can say I'm like a sponge, I'll soak up as much information as I can and when I feel it's the proper time and place I will start sharing and letting it out."

Project assistant Martha Ramoth said the participants aren't selected on the basis of formal education. The participants come from a variety of backgrounds.

"There are housewives, politicians, school district personnel. That adds a lot to the program. a variety of educations and professions." Ramoth said.

"We don't emphasize whether a person has a degree and we don't tell them to believe in issues," she added.

Ramoth, who was also a past participant, said many former students return to the project to help organize it. This year nearly 30 percent of the volunteers who are putting the project together are former students of ANLP.

Ramoth told why it was beneficial to the program when students volunteer.

"I started out as a volunteer. I had just come back from school. That's how I started helping Darlene. Me having an insight had given me an idea of what can be offered."