

# Eklutna residents oppose NBA proposal

by Joni Whitmore

Residents of Eklutna, a Dena'ina village near Anchorage, have organized recently to bring attention to a proposal by the National Bank of Alaska to mine granite from the Eklutna hills.

Approximately 15 to 20 people picketed the NBA shareholders meeting March 19, according to organizers. The residents, working with neighborhood groups and the Alaska Center for the Environment (ACE), are calling for a boycott of NBA to begin April 5.

Eklutna, or Id'Louyt'nu in the Dena'ina language, means "two hills on the river."

"Our intentions are to stop NBA from blasting its way into Eklutna," said Anna Curtis, a spokesperson for the residents.

"We feel it is morally and ethically wrong for a big business to do this to such a small village."

In February, NBA received approval with a six to two vote from the local planning and zoning commission for a conditional use permit to mine granite from the hills. NBA

project consultant Jim Kubitz acknowledged that the bank is frustrated with the situation. "All of a sudden 22 acres is going to be the end of their culture," he said.

According to Kubitz, NBA had previously sought out concerns of the village and had agreed to 22 different conditions in the permit, including hours of operation. Half the residents, he claimed, had signed on to the proposal after the concerns had been addressed.

"Debate is controversy," Kubitz added. "We haven't been able to shift the discussion."

NBA's original request for a conditional use permit was denied by the planning and zoning commission in November 1995. In February, the Commission recon-

sidered its decision and reopened the public hearing process.

Both Eklutna residents and Malcolm Forbes, associate director for the Alaska Center for the Environment, agreed that the hills for which Eklutna is named have a value that extends beyond the commercial. The hills are historically significant in that they were lookout sites for the community. "The hills have great cultural and spiritual value to the residents," said Forbes. "If you take the hills away, their sense of place is violated."

Forbes added that ACE had received calls for help from Eklutna residents. "It is not typical of the environmental issues we address, but more of an issue of environmental justice," he said.

Kubitz feels NBA's intentions have been misinterpreted, that the bank is not

A meeting was held recently between Edward Rasmuson, chairman of NBA's Board of Directors and Eklutna Village Chief Lee Stephan to consider possible compromises, but NBA is still waiting for more specifics on any kind of a land trade, according to Kubitz. He made clear that the bank would be willing to talk again with Eklutna representatives on a moment's notice. NBA plans to continue

to allow use of their land at no charge.

Kubitz clarified that NBA will continue with the appeal process, to be sure of the nature of the legal concerns raised by residents. Residents concerns were to be filed with planning and zoning by 5:00 p.m. Thursday, March 28. The bank will have 15 days to respond during this stage of the appeal.

***"If you take the hills away,  
their sense of place is violated."***

~Malcolm Forbes

Alaska Center for the Environment

interested in blasting at all, but rather cutting the granite into slabs. He said NBA is not motivated by profits to grind the granite into road material, but wants to see if there is architectural grade granite to be cut for building fascia. NBA is still researching potential markets for the stone and has found some interest in the supply of varying colorations of dimensional granite.

Residents claim geologists they've consulted say that there is nothing more than rip-rock at the site, and that they are concerned about the effect of increased traffic and noise on the community, its buildings, and tourist attractions. The residents, however, are willing to compromise according to Curtis, as they recognize "business must do business."