

Message from the Chairman...

By Thomas Richards Jr.
Chairman of the Board
Eskimo, Indian, Aleut Publishing Company

Hearing the news about the apparent demise of the *Tundra Times* last Dec. put me into a state of shock. I felt a deep sense of loss. The newspaper had been an important part of my life for a number of years. I began as a sales representative in 1968. When I left in 1980, I had completed a four-year stint as editor and publisher.

It was as if a part of me had died. The first thing I did was to hop on my snow machine and spend a couple of days chasing ptarmigan across the tundra. Then, I called the *Tundra Times* Chairman to express my condolences and to convey my understanding of how difficult a decision had been made.

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There was still hope that the newspaper would be sold and reorganized and would resurface in some form. This hope disappeared last spring when negotiations for the sale of the newspaper broke down. When the board of directors asked the shareholders last July for approval to sell what was left of the newspaper and to dissolve the company, it seemed apparent that the *Tundra Times* had met its final deadline.

However, the *Tundra Times* is a unique newspaper owned by a publishing company which, in turn, is owned by a very special group of shareholders. A small group of individuals, long-time stockholders and veteran supporters who share a vision of the newspaper as a crucial communications medium for Alaska Native people refused to let the *Tundra Times* die. They collected enough votes to prevent our newspaper from going extinct and led the effort to reorganize the newspaper and bring about its resurrection with this special edition. Our new editor and publisher was a prime mover behind the effort to breathe new life into our little newspaper. I was asked to help and was pleased to lend some of my knowledge and experience as a member of the new board of directors.

Why the *Tundra Times*? That question is as relevant today as it was 30 years ago, when our founder asked it in the first issue of the newspaper Oct. of 1962. As Chairman, I asked myself recently what mission the *Tundra Times* should fulfill today. I went back to the basics -- to what I consider the organic documents of the *Tundra Times*: the mission statement contained in the newspaper's first editorial and to the purposes of the company as stated in our articles of incorporation.

Thirty years have passed. Yet, despite the complexities of contemporary life and the challenges Native people now face in striving to achieve happy, healthy and productive lives, the basic purpose of the *Tundra Times* remains much the same. Those articles give a statement of purpose for the *Tundra Times* which is as meaningful today as it was when the newspaper was introduced: "The furtherance of a greater knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the culture, activities and problems of all Eskimo, Aleut and Indian peoples ... especially, but not limited to, the pre-

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sensation of their views, interests, needs, aspirations, hopes and desires ..."

Our original mission statement, drafted by our founding editor in our first editorial, has also withstood the passage of time and offers objectives which are as challenging and appropriate today as they were in Oct. of 1962. Our first editorial says *Tundra Times* "... will strive to keep informed on matters of interest, all Natives of Alaska ... an unbiased presentation of issues that directly concern the Natives is needed. In presenting those things that most affect Natives, we will make every effort to be truthful and objective."

A statement directed to all Native people in our first editorial in 1962 could just as easily have been written in 1992. "A reminder: Natives of Alaska, the *Tundra Times* is your paper. It is here to express your ideas, your thoughts and opinions on issues that vitally affect you. When you have a subject that you feel needs to be written about, pass that subject along. If you have something to offer, such as a good photograph you think would add to the paper, pass that along too."

These basic purposes for the *Tundra Times* remain valid, however we are reviewing our mission in view of changing circumstances in today's world. For example, who would have thought, 30 years ago, that Native people would ever be challenged in their right to earn a livelihood from the resources surrounding their homelands? Today, subsistence hunting, gathering and fishing rights of Native people are severely challenged. When we were founded, traditional forms of tribal self-government thrived and served Native communities very well. Today, tribal governments are not even acknowledged by our young state government.

My main concern is for the future of young Native people. The largest segment of the Native population is young people in their teens. For them especially, we need a *Tundra Times* which will promote pride in cultural heritage, advocate healthy and safe environments for their formative years and provoke public discussion on what we can do to help provide an economic future for the emerging generation of young Native people.

Mention of an economic future for young Native people brings me to my final point. What about an economic future for the *Tundra Times*? A motive for the shutdown of *Tundra Times* was concern that newspaper revenues were dwindling along with the general state of the economy. I have encountered this argument at least twice before in my involvement with the *Tundra Times*. The first time was when the Alaskan economy was limping along and waiting for pipeline construction to start. Again, in the late 1970's, the state's economy was sluggish. Two, actually three, important differences exist today. In prior difficult times, in addition to barriers imposed by the broader economy, we faced additional obstacles of the lack of cash for ongoing operations and the challenge of carrying burdensome debt.

Today, we do have sufficient assets to pay the costs of restarting the newspaper and enough cash on hand to pay for operations. Also, we have no significant indebtedness to burden the newspaper. The third, and most important difference, is the involvement of people from Native communities who, facing the permanent loss of their newspaper, have refused to let the *Tundra Times* die. The future of the *Tundra Times* depends, more than anything else, on our ability to serve the needs of our readership in a way which will allow Alaska Native people to consider that the *Tundra Times* will continue to serve some useful purpose in their lives.