

Opinion

A new beginning for The Tundra Times

By Paul Swetzof

It's wonderful. The Tundra Times, Alaska's only statewide Native newspaper, is back. A new board, a new beginning and a return to the paper's original mission, the voice of Alaska's Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians.

This is a critical time for Alaska Natives. The paramount issues of sovereignty, customary and traditional hunting and fishing (subsistence) and village viability are coming to a head. The Alaska Inter-Tribal Council, a new statewide tribal organization dedicated to promoting tribal interests, is in the formation process. Other Native organizations, such as the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) are promoting their views on everything from corporate affairs to subsistence.

We need these issues and news developments presented to the Alaska Native community from an Alaska Native perspective. The Tundra Times is back and not a minute too soon. There's been a lot to report and no way to report it.

One of the reasons I feel so upbeat about the paper is the new board. I'm lead to believe this board is dedicated to advocating on behalf of all Alaska Natives, our governments and our other common interests. Where the prior board left the impression that they were at times promoting corporate or other particular interests, this

new board appears to have the desire to push for all of our interests wherever they may be found.

It is important that we all consider what it is we can do to help the Tundra Times to not just survive, but to be an effective voice in promoting our interests.

There are a number of ways we can help. The submission of articles by village and urban Natives which express ideas and report on issues and events of statewide significance will allow the Times to be our real and accurate voice (this is what gave the Berger Commission report validity). Subscriptions and donations from those of us able to give will help the paper to attain financial stability. The submission of legal and other action updates will allow us all to be in on the latest developments effecting our Native governments, corporations and Native individuals.

The new Tundra Times board and staff hold the key to credibility. To the fullest extent possible staff should be Alaska Natives representing a diversity of Alaska Native cultures. A non-Alaska Native, no matter how good a reporter or sympathizer, will never be able to write with a Native perspective. Tribal and corporate perspectives must be presented equally. Opinion columns, such as mine, should be identified as such. Factual reporting should reflect facts, not the writers' opinions. The board

should consider making board policy decisions (such as an Alaska Native hiring preference) and leave politics and individual biases out of the decision making process. Staff should be allowed to run day to day operations within the policy guidelines outlined by the board. Finally, somehow, Native reporters need to get to the villages to see and hear what's really going on.

There is no reason why this wonderful idea of Howard Rock, an advocacy newspaper to promote Alaska Natives' interests, should not be a success and once again allow for a review of ideas among ourselves, a gathering of information of interest and concern to us and a place to celebrate our diverse and wonderful cultures.

Welcome back Tundra Times, we've missed you.