

New program encourages Native teachers

by Louise Sagmoen

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An Alaska Native sitting in a rural classroom is not uncommon. What is uncommon is a Native standing before a classroom actually teaching other Native students.

By 1989 the Alaska Department of Education hopes to see more Natives standing before a classroom teaching. DOE has implemented a low interest loan program where up to 100 percent of a loan will be forgiven if a rural student returns home as a teacher.

One of today's college students who may become tomorrow's teacher is 19-year-old Katrina Anderson of Takotna who is the daughter of well known Iditarod musher Eep Anderson.

Ten years ago, milling among her many friends in McGrath, she was an unlikely candidate to be selected from the Iditarod Area School District for the teacher scholarship program.

In a telephone interview from her Alaska Pacific University dormitory, she explained why she's one of the 72 students from rural Alaska participating in the 1985-86 program.

"I always liked children...I just want to teach little kids," the freshman said. At her May '85 graduation she comprised the entire Takotna senior class. She was one of seven high school students

but she hasn't had problems adjusting to classrooms as large as 30 students.

"At APU you get to know everyone. It's like a big family. Everyone gets to know everyone," Anderson said.

She says if the teacher-

teachers are Native. "Hopefully it will increase those numbers," Demmert said. Speaking of education he added, "That's one of the areas we're encouraging." UAF has always had a concentration of Native students in the education field, according to

While Demmert stated that Alaska's educational system was lacking in Native staff, Chimegalrea felt it first hand. "There was no other Natives to look up to, to help them grow," she said.

She told what the scholarship

specifically targets students from rural regions. Students who live on the highway cannot qualify for the program because that area is not considered rural.

The students were selected from 30 school districts which are mainly in the Rural Education Attendance Area.

This year 46 students chose to study in Alaska while 26 went out-of-state. Nearly a quarter of the students are already enrolled with the others entering their first year as freshmen.

The total loan award is \$423,000 while the average individual loan amount is \$5,875. If a borrower gets a teaching contract from a rural school the student will be eligible for up to 100 percent forgiveness. Loan recipients will be selected annually by their local school districts between January and April.

Legislators who sponsored the bill were Vern Hurlbert of Sleetmute, Al Adams of Kotzebue and Anchorage's Joe Hayes.

For more information contact Jane Maynard, Director for Special Programs, Teacher Scholarship Loan Program, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, Pouch FP, Juneau, AK 99811. The telephone number is 465-2854.

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scholarship program didn't exist she probably would have attended a larger university which didn't cost as much. Anderson says her acceptance came as a surprise. "I wasn't accepted at first but on graduation they gave the award," she explained.

Out of the 72 students who were selected by their rural school district boards, Anderson is only one of three students who is attending APU. Nearly half (33) of the students are attending the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, although at least two have dropped out of UAF.

UAF Alaska Native Programs Director Dennis Demmert said he supported the program because only 1-2 percent of Alaskan

Demmert.

UAF student Helen Chimegalrea explained why she chose education. "Ever since I was young I've had an interest in becoming a teacher." In a telephone interview she said she would like to see some changes in the educational system.

"In the future I'd like to see more concentration on Native students that seem to be struggling. There was a difference between us Natives and Caucasians," she said.

Another change she'd like to see is more concentration on the Yup'ik language. She said in the Bethel high school, "It's up to you if you want to take it. I'd like to see it become a requirement," she added.

program did for her. "As soon as I found out I really started thinking about the educational system in our area," she said.

The Teacher Scholarship Loan Program was established last year by the Alaska Legislature in an attempt to encourage rural graduates to pursue teaching careers in rural elementary and secondary schools. Students can borrow up to \$7,500 a year to earn a bachelors degree and teaching certificate.

DOE's Jane Maynard said there are some things that make the scholarship program distinguishable from the existing Alaska State Loan Program. "This is the first program of it's kind," she said. Students can borrow more under it and it