

Petruskas open store

For the first time, the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) has loaned money to a villager to buy a house and set up an in-home business. AHFC closed the deal with Willie Petruska and his wife, Betty. Both are lifelong residents of Nikolai, a tiny village near McGrath.

The program was developed last year by the Rural Housing Division of AHFC and the Alaska Legislature to allow the corporation to encourage cottage industries in rural areas.

The Petruskas purchased with the loan a vacant, two-story building that used to house the only grocery store in town. The store went out of business about a year ago, and it has been Willie's dream to reopen it for the community.

"A lot of people order stuff by mail, but they can't get their order the same day. I figured I'd

help out a little by having stuff at the store," Petruska said.

The Petruskas rented the building several months ago and began living upstairs.

The building and store were owned and operated by the local Native corporation McGrath-Tatlina-Nikolai-Takotna, or MTNT Ltd., closed the store because the overhead was too costly.

"We closed it because it just cost too much to run it. We thought a 'mom and pop' type of operation would do much better," said Vicky Clayman, chief executive officer and vice pres. of MTNT.

Willie Petruska thought so, too. However, securing a loan took a lot of time and persistence. Petruska has been turned down for a loan by several lending agencies the past couple years, and the AHFC loan program was one of his last hopes.