

Kotzebue resident objects to view of Bush

KOTZEBUE

By Dan Bloom

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Bush residents are fighting back.

For Debra Steckel, it's a matter of principle and pride. A former resident of Kotzebue and Nome and a 1976 graduate of Kotzebue High School, Steckel recently took pen in hand and criticized the **Anchorage Times** for a feature story it had published about Kotzebue's Dairy Queen.

"I have finally read one too many patronizing and sloppy articles about life in the Bush," Steckel wrote in a letter-to-the-editor in the **Anchorage Times**. "While it's tempting and easy for writers to gloss over or distort the facts in stories

about life in the Bush areas, there is no excuse for inaccuracy or distortion of the truth."

Steckel, now a resident of Anchorage, has fond memories of Kotzebue and Nome. Last May she came back to Kotzebue for a visit. Like many people who live in the Bush or who have lived here in the past, she feels that urban reporters often miss the real facts and atmosphere in rural cities and towns.

In the **Times'** article, Kotzebue was described by their reporter as "a tiny Eskimo village."

Countered Steckel in her letter: "The phrase 'tiny Eskimo village' is hardly accurate. With a growing popu-

lation of about 2,500, Kotzebue is anything but tiny, at least by Alaskan standards. And although the slower, more personal lifestyle is an attribute Kotzebue does share with smaller villages, it should be pointed out that this 'tiny Eskimo village' is incorporated as a second-class city, with sales taxes and several other marks of civilization."

And Steckel concluded her defense of the Bush by writing: "When you run articles about the Bush, is it too much to ask your reporters not to insult the intelligence of your readers in Anchorage and throughout the state, or the integrity of the subjects, by checking the facts? All it takes is a phone call and they do have a

phone or two in Kotzebue."

Steckel is not the first person to complain about newspaper coverage of the Bush. From time to time, articles have appeared in the national and state press with derogatory references to Bush architecture, Bush waste disposal, Bush restaurants, Bush lifestyles and Bush plane service.

But now Bush residents are beginning to answer back to their uninformed critics from

the big cities who come out to rural areas for a day or two and then return with a bundle of "stories" tucked under their arms.

Now Bush residents are fighting back, and for Debra Steckel, a former Bush resident now living in the big city, her allegiance and respect for the Bush have not withered away.

You can't push the Bush around anymore these days, it seems. People here are fighting back, a victory for rural public relations.

