

Organizations Absorb Jobs

Native service organizations, the pipeline and the Bureau of Land Management are important aspects of the Native job market in 1974.

Instead of swinging shovels, many Natives are pushing pencils for the Tanana Chiefs Association, Fairbanks Native Association, the regional corporations and similar organizations.

"We have lost some of our best Native people to these organizations," said Ed Orbeck, business agent of Fairbanks Labor Local 942.

Many of the office jobs with service organizations are well-paying, but require a dedication that often goes well beyond the 40-hour week. It's a boardroom life for many Natives once used to hunting, trapping and the great outdoors.

When five o'clock comes, executive Natives are not always through for the day. They may have to attend a meeting that night or over the weekend. And the job tends to follow them home, interfering with sleep.

Many of the organizational positions carry considerable public responsibility, and so open the job-holder to public scrutiny. And there have already been complaints among Natives that a few Native leaders are getting rich in high-salaried positions.

That, of course is debatable.

"You don't get rich working for Natives, you get poorer," said Roger Lang, after being elected to president of AFN in Anchorage last December. Lang said he had been involved in Native work for about eight years, and is sure he's poorer now than when he started.

Whatever the case, the movement of Native people to executive positions is in high gear, with the service organizations and regional corporations playing a major role. Although many are receiving on-the-job training in these jobs, increasingly more Natives are rapidly acquiring formal education in preparation for career leadership work.

Another important job market for the Native is the Bureau of Land Management under the

U.S. Department of the Interior. The role has been that of fire-fighter.

Only 25 out of 190 fire-related employees have been selected for seasonal hire this year in the Fairbanks district, and those 25 positions have not been filled yet. Seasonal work normally ensures an employee of six months work.

A force of fire-related seasonal people started work with BLM April 1, including those who spend the winter in the southern states, returning to fire jobs around this time of year. The 25 Natives should be on the job by May 12, said Richard LeDosquet, BLM district manager, Fairbanks.

LeDosquet said there will be sufficient fire-fighters available in the case of a big fire season in Alaska this year, even though many former fire-fighters will be taking pipeline jobs.

"Thirty per cent of our fire-fighters are women," he said, explaining that they are expected to remain available. The villages will continue to provide trained 22-man crews, while training of crew bosses has already been in progress in Anchorage.

LeDosquet said the Yukon River village of Eagle did not send the customary two men for crew boss training and there have been indications that Eagle will not have a crew this year, but rather look to pipeline jobs.

If a "bust" occurred in Alaska, and fire-fighters became scarce, BLM could always turn to its existing organization in the southern states, said LeDosquet. A "bust" refers to numerous major fires taking place at the same time.

The entry of Natives into the job of smoke-jumping apparently remains a slow process. Only three Natives are scheduled for training in Fairbanks this year, and just one Native was in the program last year.

Most of the jumpers continue to be assigned to Alaska from the southern states. Training for leadership roles by Natives (overheads) will continue this year, said LeDosquet. Five men are trained as a team to direct the fighting of a major fire (up to 200 men).

"We'll be in the fire business again this season," said LeDosquet, "and we'll need fire-fighters." It is not unusual to expend

\$2½ to \$3 million for emergency fire fighting in any given season, LeDosquet said.

Union Labor

On the union front, Orbeck said that hundreds of Natives are signed up on the three labor lists in readiness for pipeline-related jobs. Local 942, he said, is cooperating in hiring Natives for the jobs.

He pointed out, however, that Natives must be on hand at the labor hall to be hired.

Orbeck said the Department of Interior has agreed with Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. that Natives will be hired first after the "A" and "B" lists are exhausted. This would put Natives ahead of hundreds of laborers signed up on the "C" list.

At a meeting in Anchorage, the National Labor Relations Board said it would refer any Native hiring complaints for a decision by Interior. Approximately 150 men have been sent out on jobs from the Fairbanks hall since Jan. 1.