

AT&T gets regulatory nod to buy Alascom, eyes Bush market

by *Tundra Times* staff

In a brief ceremony for reporters last week, officials of AT&T and Alascom inked an agreement for AT&T to purchase the long-time provider of rural telephone service in Alaska.

"Today is a historic day for our corporations," said Jerry DeFrancisco, president of the newly-formed AT&T Alascom. "Today we join to become one company. We're excited about this. This company will bring people

together any time, any place."

DeFrancisco said market research is underway to identify the services most needed and wanted by Alaskans. He added that a capital investment plan to upgrade and convert Alascom's statewide system of earth stations to more sophisticated technology will soon be completed. Also being analyzed are the needs of rural telecommunications.

"The Bush customers are very important to AT&T Alascom," DeFrancisco said.

Although Alascom has had a monopoly on rural long distance phone service that has continued virtually unchanged to the present, long-time interstate service rival GCI has recently asked state and federal regulators for permission to conduct a comprehensive telecommunications "demonstration project" in 50 rural communities. During the unveiling of that plan, GCI officials said they had approached AT&T about being the newcomer's rural service pro-

vider once the deal with Alascom was sealed.

However, DeFrancisco seemed skeptical about such an arrangement with GCI.

"It's not clear to me from looking at GCI's proposal what services they are intending to provide. We intend to serve the Bush directly," he said.

DeFrancisco said he had met personally with all members of the company's rural service advisory committee and would continue relying on the group for input on

how best to provide rural services.

He noted that AT&T had already invested \$25 million for a new switching device which will serve as a platform for new services to be provided in the Alaska market. He said many of AT&T's global business and consumer services will now be available to Alaskans. He said the company also plans to continue Alascom's policy of contributions to non-profit organizations and civic events.