



Trefon Angasan signs a Mike Williams poster. Mike Williams participated in the Iditarod Sled Dog Race carrying sobriety pledges for the AFN Sobriety Movement.

Photo by Greg Nothstine

## As communities do their part, state must now do its part, too

Community leaders in Barrow have shown immense courage and character in pursuing the fight for an alcohol-free community. And they are not alone. In many communities, from Southeast to the river deltas of southwest Alaska, village officials have pushed the envelope in the search for solutions to alcohol abuse, violence and bootlegging. In some cases, these zealous efforts have put village councils in conflict with state law enforcement agencies, raising important issues of jurisdiction and personal liberty, which will take some time to resolve permanently.

Invariably, when such conflicts are sorted out, parties find they want much the same thing. They find that with some patience, flexibility and communication — speaking clearly and listening well — that solutions come much more easily.

In particular, we'd like to commend the Alaska State Troopers for their recent and laudable efforts to work with small communities fighting the ravages of alcohol abuse. Often they are the first state officials to respond to local initiatives which may not fully mesh with state policies. In so doing, they have demonstrated not only a high degree of professionalism but also a refreshing sense of pragmatism and innovation. We look forward to further positive results.

Not all state agencies have progressed with the same level of commitment. Barrow Mayor Don Long has noted some difficulty in securing the dedicated prosecution of bootleggers. If our communities are not to fall through the cracks of indifference, we must insist on appropriate, aggressive state response against alcoholism at all authorized levels:

- Local and regional district attorneys and their urban supervisors, must all be personally committed to wiping out the scourge of bootlegging and its related criminal manifestations. Where necessary, they must receive the legal and cultural-sensitivity training to be effective;

- Those DAs need to know that this issue is a top priority of the chief executive;

- The Alaska Legislature must provide adequate funding, not only for prosecutions and punishments of alcohol offenders, but other prevention and treatment programs so that we confront alcoholism in a comprehensive and systematic way.

Alcoholism is a social disease. It results from breakdowns and dysfunctions in our society that cry out for a vigorous, compassionate, collective response. We all, individuals, communities and state officials, must do our part.



*Singing the Sober Song* is a publication of the Tundra Times for the promotion of sobriety and alcohol/substance abuse prevention. We are pleased to offer the second edition to you and hope that you find the articles and commentaries useful and thought provoking. If you would like to advertise or submit articles or commentaries, please send them to *Singing the Sober Song*, c/o Tundra Times, P.O. Box 92247, Anchorage, Alaska 99509-2247, or by calling toll free in Alaska - 1-800-764-2512.

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