

Differences resolved; Aleut rejoins AFN

By BILL HESS

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There was a toast of wine and a cheer of unity aboard a boat cruising Glacier Bay last week as Land Claims Board members celebrated the return of the Aleut Corporation to the Alaska Federation of Natives. The board had voted the Aleuts back in during an earlier meeting at Hoonah.

The Aleuts left AFN back in 1977, "due to philosophical differences then existing," according to information released by Agafon Krukoff, President of the Aleut Corp.

"The Aleuts decision came as a result of re-assessing our role in statewide Native Affairs and in consideration of the need for a united voice in matters affecting all Alaska Natives," Krukoff said.

In an expression of satisfaction with the welcome given the corporation in the special meeting, he also noted that the spirit of Alaska Native unity is "one of the most important factors necessary to the continued survival of the Native cultures and lifestyles, and success of the regions as leaders in the corporate world of

Alaska."

Janie Leask, the executive vice-president of AFN added that the return of the Aleuts marks the first time in many years that all 12 regional corporations are on the board. The Arctic Slope Native Corporations was just coming into the ranks of AFN at the time the Aleuts went out. "This will give us a united front, both in Juneau and Washington, D.C.," she said.

"AFN was never weak," she continued. "It was always strong. Still, we used to say that we were a statewide political organization representing 11 of the 12 regions.

Now we can say we represent all 12. We're very excited about it!"

Leask anticipates that there will be somewhat greater accessibility to Alaska's congressional delegation for the Aleuts as a result of the reunification.

AFN representatives soon will be presenting testimony at congressional hearings in Washington D.C. on behalf of the Aleut Corp.'s request for permission to provide shipping to the Aleutian Islands.

Aleut is seeking to be allowed an exclusionary clause in the Merchant Marine Act to allow the

Aleut Shipping Corp. and the American Presidents Line to ship goods to the Aleutians.

Presently, the Aleut shipping company is subsidized by the federal government, and as such, cannot ship to the islands. Krukoff last month filed a request that the company be allowed to ship provide much-needed frequent and regular shipping to the islands.

Several larger shippers which do not provide the type of service that Aleut is requesting, are opposing the change and the support of AFN will be beneficial to the Aleut Corp.