

Barrow plans Town Meeting to discuss study

The residents of Barrow are invited to participate in a town meeting on January 24, 1980, at 7:30 p.m. The purpose of the Town Meeting is to discuss problems of alcohol abuse and possible solutions. The Town Meeting is being organized by the newly formed Barrow Interagency Coordinating Council on Alcohol. It will be held in the C.E. Building of the Utkeagvik Presbyterian Church. Representatives of governmental agencies and oil company officials have also been invited to attend. The Chairman of the Council is Carl Hild, Health Education Specialist in the North Slope Borough/Health and Social Service Agency.

The Town Meeting is the result of growing frustration with alcohol abuse in Barrow; and comes at the conclusion of a research-planning project of the Borough. Since January of 1977, over 3,200 alcohol related detentions have occurred in Barrow by the North Slope Borough/Department of Public Safety for the protection of the individual and the community.

Because the Director of Public Safety, Kim Moeller, is concerned about the long-term effects of the Preventive Detention Program; a research-planning firm, INTERSECT, INC., of Snohomish, Washington, together with the Center for Research on the Acts of Man (University of Pennsylvania) has conducted the project on behalf of the Borough. The Consultant was instructed to identify causative factors and possible solutions to problems of alcohol abuse which has been increasing in amount and among more people living in Barrow. Funding for the project has been provided locally by the Borough along with community support in addition to contribution and grant from the State of Alaska and ARCO Oil and Gas Company.

The consultant was also instructed to evaluate the Borough's Preventive Detention Program and to assist in finding other ways whereby the community problem of alcohol abuse could be ameliorated. The Barrow Interagency Coordinating Council on Alcohol has been

organized by social service agencies and individuals who have cooperated in the research planning project. The Town Meeting on January 24 will be an opportunity for the council and the Consultant to report on their work.

KING Television, Channel 5, in Seattle, has contributed a short documentary to assist in the presentation of a comprehensive cooperative program. It is hoped that public opinion in Barrow will then encourage and support the Program.

Because the problem under consideration is occurring in an energy development area; the Borough and the Consultant agreed to involve the Center for Research on the Acts of Man (University of Pennsylvania). Participation of the Center also provided access to the Energy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The energy Center prepares many professionals for work in the United States Department of Energy and petroleum companies.

In the research report The Inupiat, Economics, and Alcohol

on the Alaskan North Slope the researchers report that deaths due to alcohol poisoning or to severe medical complications due to alcoholism have been climbing rapidly among Alaska Natives over the past 25 years. Currently the alcohol deaths among non-natives. However, among the various Alaska native ethnic groups, the Inupiat Eskimo of the North Slope are about mid-range in alcohol death rates. Furthermore recent research in other energy development areas such as the North sea, Greenland, and Northern Canada reveal that similar problems of alcohol abuse accompany economic expansion, redistribution of the expanded resources, heightened political activity, together with social and cultural dislocation among native peoples.

The researchers have documented that Barrow was almost free of suicides and homicides before 1973; but, the community suffered six suicides and three homicides between 1973 and 1978. This sudden increase is produced in part by a drama-

tic increase in alcohol consumption during the same time period. Furthermore, a drunk offender is involved in more than half the violent attacks that have occurred in Barrow over the three years, 1976-1978. The quantity of alcohol consumed and its effects on the community records and a systematic sample survey which included an ethnographic field study. The Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test was utilized.

The conclusion of the Consultant based on the research of the Center is that programs to alleviate alcohol abuse and its effects in Barrow are urgently needed. There are two aspects of alcohol abuse in Barrow: the specific alcohol problem and the underlying social upheaval of recent years related to energy development in the North Slope area. The research report suggests policy decisions which can slow the amount of drinking in the community; and, the report identifies the types of and amount of special care required

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by those who are alcoholic or near alcoholic, 45% to 72% of the sampled population. However, the report states "the wider issue is to recognize that much of the growth in drinking is being generated by the massive social changes now occurring in Barrow as a result of oil development in the North Slope. Major changes in Barrow's relation with the outside world and its patterns of social and economic development".

The problems of alcohol abuse is so great that the Consul-

tant is recommending three types of actions be considered: 1) maintaining and improving the program of protective custody; 2) affecting the availability of alcohol in the community; and 3) creating new social norms governing drinking behavior.