



Statewide Employment & Education Guide

Alex and Williams

by Dabney Cannelos

Dan Alex, an Athabascan from Eklutna, and Joe Williams, a Tlingit from Ketchikan, recently met with Alaska Pacific University's (APU) President Dr. Glenn Olds to discuss APU's role in post secondary education for Alaska Natives.

Both Alex and Williams graduated from the college. Alex was Alaska Methodist's first graduate. He graduated in 1964 with a degree in Math and Physics. He is enrolled to Eklutna Corporation and served as their president for a number of years.

Williams was APU's first graduate. He graduated in 1979

with a degree in Business Management. He now works for Alaska Brick Company.

Both men now serve on the APU Board of Trustees. As Trustees, both men feel that it is their job to see that APU meets the cultural and educational needs of the Alaska Native community, since the Native community has the largest educational deficiency in the State.

"Dr. Gordon Gould, the Aleut founder and former President of AMU, initiated our meeting with Dr. Olds because he felt that APU should work closely with Native leaders to

assess the Native community's immediate needs, then orchestrate programs to fit these needs," Alex said.

"Dr. Gould is right. As Native leaders, we must serve as role models for Native students today, many of whom are still afraid of the racial bias their older brothers faced," Alex explained. "I never had problems with English because my father made sure I knew English."

"When I graduated, however, I had problems finding a job in Alaska! I applied for a teacher's position in Glenallen. The principal cut the interview short when he discovered I was Native."

"I worked outside for years. Then returned and used my knowledge to help create the Alaska Land Claims Settlement Act."



Discussing Alaska Pacific University's role in post secondary education for Alaska Natives are Joe Williams (left), Dr. Glenn Olds (center), and Dan Alex (right).

"Alaska Native students now need to be made aware that the climate has changed. Alaskan Businesses now seek Native expertise, especially bilingual expertise. Education has become

a new way to subsist in both the Native culture and the Western culture."

"As Native leaders we are the only people who can show today's Native students the way because we have been there," Alex stated.

At their initial meeting with Dr. Olds, Alex and Williams suggested that APU should start to solve the Native community leadership shortage problem by conducting a series of concentrated management seminars with Native leaders and Alaskan business men as instructors instead of trying to bring in experts from the lower forty eight who cannot understand village problems.

Seminars will first be held in Anchorage. They may later be held in the villages so that more people might participate.

Alex and Williams also discussed Native students' needs for coping with the pressures of cultural shock when they first arrive from the villages.

Williams feels that both he and Alex, as trustees, can adequately understand the Alaska Native students' needs and present them to the Board because he and Alex were both once students themselves.

Williams also believes that APU will be able to help Alaska Native students cope with cultural shock better than other schools because it is an Alaskan school and because it can teach students on a one to one basis. Students can be people at APU. At larger universities here in Alaska and Outside students are merely numbers. The professors do not have time to work with students on an individual basis.

"When I first went to college I had the same problem as many Native students today. I graduated from Mount Edgecumbe and went to Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka. My class had 82 students in it. I then moved to the University of New Mexico which had 37,000 students. I felt lost and out of place so I quit and went to Fort Lewis."

"I finally started all over as a freshman in business at AMU in 1972. At last I found a home, but AMU's doors closed. When they reopened in 1978 I returned. I finally graduated in 1979."

Alex and Williams hope that the community will not consider them 'Apple Natives' because they have joined the APU Board of Trustees.