

ANB views self as action group

By **BILL HESS**

Tundra Times Staff

It was more than 53 years ago that 14-year-old Robert Martin first accompanied his father to a meeting of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. "I had heard so much about ANB," Martin remembers, "that I wanted to see what it was all about." Martin was impressed enough to remain a member for all these decades, and dedicated enough to earn the type of trust which just won him his second term as Grand Camp President.

"I have always felt that ANB is our vehicle for action," Martin explains. "It is the organization that would help our people in Alaska. We go back in history for the past 69 years, and we have done many things for the Native people of Alaska. We have always worked through the courts or the Legislature to secure those rights which are rightfully ours. We never use force or violence. We use the system."

In his wallet, Martin carries a membership card which lists

some of the past accomplishments which the Grand Camp claims credit for. As the oldest politically organized Native group in Alaska, and perhaps in the country, ANB has gained the recognition of Native Alaskans as citizens. In 1924, the brothers won a victory for which they had been pushing when Congress granted Natives the right to vote. They fought for and won the integration of public schools.

They lobbied and finally won an extension of work-

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ANB to face fishing battle, subsistence

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men's compensation laws to cover all. The ANB takes credit for having won aid to children, and senior citizens; for having brought the IRA governments to Alaska, the establishment of Native hospitals, and for getting an equal rights law passed in Alaska in 1945. This measure failed in the territorial Legislature in 1943, but the brothers continued to work for it and it passed in 1945. "It is the best equal rights law in any state," Martin believes.

The ANB also initiated the Tlingit and Haida Land Claims suit which was settled in 1968, winning \$7.5 million for the Tlingit and Haida people. They set up a permanent fund which now runs the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida tribes.

Now, Martin feels the major issues facing ANB are those which haunt Natives statewide: the subsistence fight, federal cutbacks, and fisheries battles.

Martin also sees a need for unity among all Alaska Natives, and would like to see more participation in the Brotherhood and the Sisterhood. "We have

camps in Anchorage, Kodiak, and Copper Center," Martin notes. "There is also a Barrow camp, although they have not been here for nine years." The ANB originally was formed in Southeast Alaska, and this is where its strength remains. There is a camp in virtually every Tlingit and Haida village throughout the area.

"We're a real grass roots organization," Martin boasts. "Our village camps hold weekly meetings, or sometimes bi-weekly. Everything goes back to the people. We act on their input. The Grand Camp President and the other leaders cannot do anything without the consent of the governed."

All members are required to pay \$12 dues annually, and are expected to give of their time and efforts as well. Many fundraisers are held. Martin believes that such requirements create a commitment to the organization, and as a result, more work is done by it. ANB is growing. A year ago, Martin notes that the Grand Camp membership was just under 2500. This year, he says it is closer to 3000.

"Young people are finally taking an interest," Martin explains as one reason for the growth. "They are evidently being educated by our camps. Some camps are even starting junior organizations. This is a good sign. Without the young people, we wouldn't have any future."

As evidence of this growth and rising interest, Martin notes that the convention held this month in Ketchikan was the largest and most enthusiastic of any held during the past few years.

Martin also claims that the three main Native organizations in Southeast Alaska are working closer together now than in the past. "Sealaska, the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida and the ANB-ANS are developing a good working relationship, where we come together as a single unit after the same goals. There was a time not long ago when it seemed we were going off in three different directions."

Although Martin does not like the manner in which fed-



Robert Martin

eral cuts are being implemented, sudden, with no phase-in period to allow for adjustment to other systems, he believes his people will still prevail. "We feel it's not going to hurt us too much," he maintains.

Much of the future depends on what happens after 1991, the year the Native

corporations lose the special protections they now have and become subject to taxes and when shareholders will be able to sell their stocks to anyone, including non-Natives. "We will be talking more about this in the future," Martin notes. "We will stress that shareholders should hang onto their stock no matter what!"

Martin is adamant on subsistence rights. "We have always had our rights as subsistence users, since time immemorial. We feel there have been compromises along the way, and some of our rights have been weakened. We can't hunt out of season. We can't take 'too much' game. Traditionally, we have been conservationists. We would never deplete a stream, because we know the fish wouldn't come back. . . . There will be no more compromise!"

Martin also opposes the closure of Mount Edgecumbe High School. "Many of our leaders have been introduced to the ANB-ANS through Mt. Edgecumbe," Martin explains.