

North Slope Borough battles unemployment

by Mayor George N. Ahmaogak Sr.
for the Tundra Times

Until recent years, there was limited interest on the part of residents of the North Slope Borough in jobs that were available in the Prudhoe Bay and Kuparuk oilfields.

The primary reason for this disinterest was the number of well paying construction jobs available in the villages related to the borough's Capital Improvements Program.

These jobs did not require residents to leave their families for extended periods of time.

However, as projects built under the Capital Improvements Program were completed, construction spending began a steep decline and unemployment within the borough began growing to serious proportions. This prompted me to establish a Direct Employment Service and a training program to help alleviate the unemployment problem.

The Direct Employment Service was established to help oilfield employers locate qualified borough



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residents for oilfield jobs. The program is basically a referral service, built on a data bank of employment applications received from residents throughout the borough.

During the first year of the pro-

gram's existence, 134 borough residents were placed in oilfield jobs.

The focus of the training program is to provide residents with skills in operations and maintenance disciplines for which permanent employment is often found, as opposed to construction trades, which typically lead to seasonal work.

The operations and maintenance disciplines on which we are concentrating include administrative office skills, building maintenance, food service, electrical maintenance, power plant operation, management, vehicle and equipment maintenance, warehousing-expediting, water and wastewater treatment plant operation and welding.

It is noteworthy that people with skills in these disciplines are needed both in the villages and in the oilfields, which expands their employment opportunities even more.

The successful reduction in unemployment within the borough through the DES and the training program is the result of the joint efforts of the borough government, the oil in-

dustry and Piquini Management Corp., contractual managers of the service.

The DES continues to enable oilfield employers to find and hire increasing numbers of qualified residents.

By establishing an ongoing training program, the borough is providing more of its residents with the skills that oilfield employers require of the local labor force. In fact, Arco Alaska Inc. and Standard Alaska Production Co. sponsor the second year of training for those residents in technically oriented disciplines.

I am aware that several of the for-profit and not-for-profit Native corporations also have established similar programs for the benefit of both residents and employers in their areas of the state.

My administration suggests such programs provide workable and mutually beneficial solutions to resolving local unemployment.

George N. Ahmaogak Sr. of Barrow is the mayor of the North Slope Borough.