

Nearly Half of BIA Employees are Natives

Nearly half of the Bureau of Indian Affairs employees in Alaska are Alaska Natives, it is reported from the Juneau Area office. Native hire within the bureau has risen sharply in the past few years in line with policies of Indian Affairs Commissioner Robert L. Bennett.

Of a total 1250 BIA Alaska employees, about 600, or 48%, are Native, according to Dave Weaver, Chief of the Branch of Personnel for Alaska. This is a dramatic increase in Alaska over five years ago when barely half that number were employed.

About 80 percent of the vacancies in clerical and blue collar jobs are filled by Alaska Natives. They hold only a small percentage of the more technical positions, explained Weaver, because of the educational requirements attached to the many teaching and social service positions. This percentage is rising as the number of Natives in higher education increases.

Native hire on field station jobs is an example of the bureau's practice. Roughly

95 percent of all field station maintenance men in Alaska are local Natives. Each summer, training in the up-keep and operation of light plants and other equipment is given for them by the branch of Plant Management.

One significant factor in the rise of Alaska Native hire is increased educational opportunity. The BIA makes every effort to encourage students to pursue education and training beyond high school. The numbers of Native students in higher learning has risen tremendously, from just 54 twelve years ago to over 1000 today.

The Native people are awakening to the value of education. Assistance is given in the form of scholarship grants. Native students attend colleges and universities, vocational and trade schools, and the bureau's own Heskell Institute and the Institute of American Indian Arts.

And although numbers of Alaska Natives students are still small, the bureau foresees no change in the tremendous upswing into higher education.