

***Training Pays Off—***

# **More Than 400 Rural Alaskans**

# **Trained by Operation Mainstream**

More than 400 residents of rural Alaska have been trained for semi-skilled and skilled jobs during the past two years by Operation Mainstream.

In addition to learning job skills, the rural residents also earned about \$200,000 in wages for their work and built housing and public works facilities in their villages.

These statistics were compiled by Mrs. Mary Gange, Operation Mainstream director for RurALCAP.

"Projects ranging from a telephone system in one Interior village to 32-foot bridges in a Bering Seacoast town show the ability of villagers to improve their communities and hold jobs," Mrs. Gange explained.

Mrs. Gange read off an impressive list of accomplishments by people in their own villages as proof that Operation Mainstream is a factor for progress in rural Alaska.

"Since 1967, when Operation Mainstream started, six community halls have been built. Several villages built water and electrical facilities and even a phone system with Operation Mainstream funds," she said.

Mrs. Gange explained that Operation Mainstream provides money mainly for wages. Materials must come from other sources, including village resources or other government agencies. "The \$200,000 in wages is 73% of our total operating budget," she said.

"Many of the agencies don't have money available for wages, or have limited funds which can dovetail well with Operation Main-

stream funds," she continued. And some of the projects are not possible under guidelines for other agencies, Mrs. Gange added.

An example of dovetailing projects is now underway in Kotzebue, she said. The U.S. Public Health Service has a project to bring a water system to the town of 2,000.

PHS project supervisors are training seven Kotzebue residents in pipe fitting and laying, so that they will eventually join the Pipefitters and Plumbers Union apprenticeship program.

Once through the union, the men are expected to find jobs working on the Trans-Alaska pipeline from the North Slope to Valdez. While in preliminary training, the seven men must still make a living. That is where Operation Mainstream is vital: it pays their wages.

Perhaps the most ambitious Operation Mainstream project now underway is the reconstruction of tramways on a portage between Kalskag on the Kuskokwim River and Russian Mission on the Yukon River.

When completed, the tramways and related dams will permit small boat access between the two main rivers for the first time in several decades.

The old tramways were constructed by the Alaska Road Commission in 1931. Over the years, lack of maintenance left the route unusable. Work on the portage and tramway is being done by villagers from Russian Mission and

The project includes a rough roadway from Kalskag to Mud Creek and a tramway leading to a

lake which flows into the Johnson River. At the northern end of the water route another tramway and a dam will facilitate travellers.

Old tramway rails are being fixed up, new ties made from area timber, and other materials being provided by the villagers. A D-7 tractor will be used, part of the Surplus Military Equipment acquired by RurALCAP from the federal government.

Old winches are being made useable for pulling boats out of the water by hand. The entire project is expected to be complete later this year.

Kalskag is also the site of a Bureau of Indian Affairs-Operation Mainstream housing project, where 17 houses were built and four renovated.

A number of other Operation Mainstream projects have already helped aid transportation in the rural areas. One is a one-and-a-half mile gravel roadway at Akhiok on Kodiak Island; construction of two 32-foot bridges at Goodnews Bay over a ravine; and a third was a tramway across a creek and slough on Nelson Island near the village of Tununak.