

# New Approach at Nome Housing Program

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"If you are going to spend money on people do it so that they remain people."

The statement was made by Father James Poole of Nome, but it might also be given as the underlying philosophy of the Nome Housing Committee, of which he is a member.

Comprised of Nome residents, the committee has tried to build a 50-unit housing project there into a model for all of Alaska.

It is too early to tell if they will succeed, but it appears that strong foundations for such an accomplishment have been laid.

The development is being financed by the Alaska State Housing Authority, which estimates the final cost will exceed one million dollars.

The first ten houses were completed in mid-August, and Father Poole projected that they would all be finished sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

If so, then the completion will climax nearly one year of work begun last January by the Housing Committee.

Unlike many housing projects, this one was not planned entirely in some office in Washington or New York. Rather, much of the planning has taken place right in Nome.

According to Al Nakak, Rural CAP director in Nome and advisor to the Housing Committee, the committee held a general meeting in January where a tentative house plan was presented.

After discussing it, the people decided to build 10 of the houses according to that plan and to revise it for 40 others. The revision involved converting a cold storage area into an insulated room for use as a bedroom or utility room.

Also, he continued, the people chose to have blown oil heat, and a gas stove rather than an electric one because more were familiar with gas.

Construction began in July. Arranged in four rows at one end of town, the attractive green, pink, and gray frame houses stand out from the shacks and dated houses lining Nome's dirt streets.

Inside, the trend continues. Walls are covered with a light wood paneling and floors with linoleum. A modern stove, refrigerator, and dark wood cabinets fill each kitchen. Electric lights, running water and sewer complete the picture of a modern suburban home. The four bedrooms are designed as alcoves without doors for better circulation of heat.

Eventually the project is to have a community building and two lots are to be developed as a playground.

All this in a town where, according to Father Poole, about half the people depend on door-to-door sales for their water supply and on honey buckets for sewage disposal.

And, Nakak said, the housing situation itself is critical—both poor and scarce.

But still the housing committee is not taking for granted that the project will be an automatic success.

To foster community pride, a contest was held to name the development. Also, an open house was held in one of the completed homes for both applicants and the general public.

To be eligible for a home, applicants must be low income residents of Nome, whether white or native.

The last of August, 82 families had applied for the 50 homes. Only a few were white, Father Poole said, and they were over income.

Under the program, one of

the occupants are charged no downpayment and monthly payments vary with the family composition and annual income and may be as low as \$35 a month.

Selected by the Housing Committee, manager Max Grey will be in charge of the project and orientation for the new dwellers. He was scheduled to attend a three-week course in management in Anchorage conducted by the Alaska State Housing Authority.

The orientation, Father Poole said, will be on an individual or small group basis as the occupants move in. Proper operation of the stove, refrigerator and heater will be demonstrated.

A somewhat similar housing project in Behtel has run into several problems since its com-

pletion last spring. About three of the homes have been destroyed by fires and half of the 200 have stood empty due in part to ill feelings toward the project. Efforts are now underway to improve the situation.

But possibly the difficulties there have provided a learning experience for the Nome Housing Committee and have helped its members build a development that its residents will be proud to live in.

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