

# Kotzebue area reactivates I.R.A. corp.

By MARGIE BAUMAN

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** An IRA Corporation is a federally-chartered Alaska Native or American Indian membership corporation authorized by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, as amended for Alaska in 1936. The IRA corporations in Alaska are currently regarded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as the basic units of tribal governments for Alaska Native groups. IRA corporations are vehicles which the Congress authorized to perpetuate the special relationship between Alaska Native groups and the United States government based upon the status of Natives as American Indians.

KOTZEBUE—Talk about the IRA in Kotzebue these days and you're dealing not in Irish political problems but the latest vehicle for Native control on federal programs serving area residents.

The Kotzebue IRA (authorized by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934) Council is one of several reactivated in Northwest Alaska recently, thanks to funding under Public Law 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination Act.

"On a long term basis, the possibilities are endless," said Mary Schaeffer, who helped reorganize IRA Councils in this region along with brother-in-law Bobby Schaeffer and June Nelson. Nelson is now working full-time as manager of the Kotzebue IRA Council.

Initially, the Kotzebue IRA is thinking about getting an indoor recreation center for the community and contracting federal programs now handled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"We can request that the federal government loan us their

experts at their expense, until the person we want to take over is ready to take over," Schaeffer said. "Local administration of programs would cut out a lot of red tape."

The IRA Councils can borrow BIA employee services through the Intergovernmental Personnel Act, which allows federal employees with special skills to work for tribal bodies up to four years under such a plan.

There are also a variety of federal education programs which the Kotzebue IRA and others in the region hope to use to prepare potential employees in skills necessary to operate programs themselves.

Time was when the chief responsibilities of IRA councils were that of a local governing body, including staking of trails. All that changed with statehood and in most villages, IRA Councils faded out of the community leadership.

Now the reactivated ones hope, in the long run, to exert a stronger Native influence on federal programs to Native people, taking into account the typical low incomes, harsh climate, geographic isolation and an extraordinary high cost of living.

The IRA councils can also use grant monies to develop or update tribal records systems, survey federal programs available to them and recruit and train people to implement contracts under the Indian Self-Determination Act.

One responsibility the Kotze-

bue IRA Council has already taken on is the highly sensitive issue of caribou permits for the emergency hunting period now in effect.

Kotzebue residents must claim their permits at the IRA office in the Eskimo Building on Front Street, Kotzebue's main street. A committee of five people familiar with most Native families in this city had to sit down and determine which families were going to get caribou and how many, Bobby Schaeffer said.

When Bobby Schaeffer was called on at a Nov. 8 meeting of the IRA to explain how and why the permits were being issued as they are, there was a considerable discussion and at least a couple of hunters said that if their families desperately needed the meat, they would hunt caribou with or without a permit.

The IRA Council said several hundred permits had been issued and more would be in the spring and noted that the list was flexible, to allow for changes in case of particular family needs.

This is just one area where the IRA hopes to prove that programs for Native people run by Natives from the community will prove more efficient and

satisfying to those affected than the present system does.

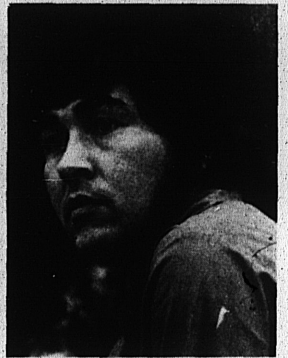
Although the Kotzebue IRA Council has an automatic membership of all Native people in the community, it is mainly the older residents who are familiar with the IRA. The Nov. 8 meeting drew a cross-section of age groups, but the newly

elected board proved to be dominated with those who recalled the days of the old IRA.

They are: Fletcher Gregg Sr., president; Rachel Craig, vice president; Elmer Armstrong, secretary-treasurer, and members Dick Curtis, Lena Sours, Jacob Stalker and York Wilson Sr.



JUNE NELSON, manager of the Kotzebue IRA Council.



BOBBY SCHAEFFER, planner for the Kotzebue IRA Council, listens to reaction on his report on how the caribou hunting permits were being distributed.

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