

## ALASKA SKILL CENTER

According to Jerry Hiley, Director of Vocational and Continuing Education in the Department of Education, the seven-year-old Alaska Skill Center in Seward is in the initial stages of evolving into a more sophisticated vocational-technical school. Hiley is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the institution.

A conspicuous monolith towering the Seward skyline will notate the addition of the newest course. The course, which began April 4 with an enrollment of 24, is on oilfield utility technology. The monolith is a working 96-foot oil derrick capable of a 6,000 foot drilling depth. Most of the cost of the \$230,000 derrick was donated by the John Cassidy Companies, an Oklahoma oil firm. Federal Manpower monies covered about \$90,000 of that cost.

Hiley expects delivery of the derrick in June and erection on school property 1½ miles north of Seward later this summer.

The course was added to the mechanical cluster of courses at the skill center, one of four course clusters offered. Upon completion of the six month course, graduates can qualify for entry level oilfield jobs or can enter a petrochemical course leading to an associates degree at Kenai Peninsula Community College.

"I think it's going to be one of the best courses in the state," Hiley said, adding that the Alaska oil industry has endorsed the course. "The knowledge the students gain from the course will enable any graduate to hold jobs particularly in Alaska; it has great potential for the future."

The three other course clusters, building trades (carpentry, plumbing, electrical furnace repair), culinary (cooks, bakers), office occupations (typing, bookkeeping, filing) also are geared to train Alaskans to land jobs in Alaska. And with the addition of courses such as the oil utility course, the skill center is responding to the changing needs of the state's varied industries.

"One of the things that industrial representatives are emphasizing is that they want people trained at a higher level," Hiley said.

"We have always been geared pretty much to the basic entry level, or channeled students into an entry level job or to an on-the-job training program following their classroom training, but now they're beginning to ask for more technical people."

In the past, the skill center program has prepared students for job needs on the trans-Alaska pipeline. As job demands from the almost completed pipeline quieted, the skill center shifted its focus from training people for construction jobs to training people for pipeline finishing work, such as line insulators and pump station workers.

The new oilfield technology course is the center's initial effort to supply a continuing need of personnel to industry for routine oilfield work.

The center, the only residential training center for adults in Alaska, is capable of handling 175 students, some of whom go on to brighter-than-ever futures. For instance, skill center graduates have enjoyed a dramatic increase in wages over what they were earning prior to enrollment. A survey of more than 900 former students revealed that pre-training annual salaries averaged \$1,755 while post-training salaries leaped to \$8,628. Twenty-six had incomes more than \$20,000 annually.

Graduates today, estimates indicate, will gross more than \$5 million in annual wages and will pay back some \$1 million in taxes, a figure that exceeds training costs at the school.

The center curriculum includes high school completion through the General Education Development program. Although 100 of the equivalency diplomas are awarded annually, students are not required to obtain GEDs to graduate from one of the center's clusters.

Driver Education also is offered. Some 75 percent of the students lack drivers licenses. Counseling is offered to help trainees understand legal and health responsibilities.

During the two years from the beginning of 1974 to the end of 1975, a total of 919 students graduated from the center. Some 593 were Native Alaskans

and 307 were Caucasians. A total of 19 represent other ethnic groups.

Enrollment in the fall of 1976 indicated 65 percent were men and 35 percent women.

The skill center has removed many Alaskans from public assistance roles. Of 276 trainees surveyed during the first quarter of 1975 some 142, or 51 percent, had been on public assistance sometime since 1969. Immediately prior to enrolling at the school, 31.9 percent were receiving assistance of various types.

A post training review of the 142 students indicated that only 20, or 14 percent of the original 275, had received public assistance since entering training.

Federal Manpower dollars support about 80 percent of total tuition costs, and room and board payments.

## ALASKA'S LABOR MARKET IN MARCH

**Employment and Unemployment:** Alaska's unemployment rate dropped slightly from 14.5 percent in February to 14.4 percent in March. Though the actual number of unemployed still increased slightly during the month of March, a moderate increase in total employment produced the drop in the unemployment rate. The improved employment picture during the month of March was primarily the result of seasonal activity. Those industries which are normally thought to be highly seasonal showed some increase in employment during the month of March. It should be pointed out that the seasonal increases in employment experienced in recent years will not occur this year. The completion of the trans-Alaska pipeline is the main factor behind this new trend. Not only will there be just a modest increase in seasonal employment this summer, but as the pipeline is completed in early summer there will be a mass layoff of workers almost similar to that experienced during the months of October, November, and December of 1976. This massive layoff of workers will actually produce an atypical trend during the summer of 1977, with total employment actually declining slightly rather than increasing.

**Mining:** Employment in the mining industry rose 2 percent during the month of March. Increased activity in the oil industry continues to be a major source of new employment in this industry.

**Construction:** Employment in the construction industry is showing signs of seasonal improvement. There are several projects throughout the state which began to get underway during the month of March. Employment also increased along the trans-Alaska pipeline where it is estimated that employment will peak at approximately 10,500 persons by early April.

**Manufacturing:** Employment in the manufacturing industries continues to be above levels experienced one year ago. Improved employment opportunities in the lumber and wood products industry continue

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INSURED UNEMPLOYED IN ALASKA			
State Unemployment Insurance			
	Insured Unemployed Based on Key Week		
	3-77	2-77	3-76
Total Weeks Claimed.....	16,400	16,341	12,883
Percent Distribution			
Characteristic	100	100	100
Total.....			
Sex and Age			
<u>Men</u>			
Under 45.....	59	60	57
45 and over.....	18	19	20
<u>Women</u>			
Under 45.....	18	16	17
45 and over.....	5	5	6
Industry			
Mining.....	2	2	3
Contract Construction.....	49	51	43
Manufacturing.....	9	8	12
Transp.-Comm. & Utilities...	10	10	11
Trade.....	10	10	12
Finance-Insurance & R. E....	2	3	2
Service & Miscellaneous....	16	14	12
All Other.....	2	2	5
Occupation			
Professional & Managerial...	6	6	7
Clerical & Sales.....	11	10	10
Service.....	9	10	10
Farming-Fishing & Forestry..	2	2	2
Processing.....	3	3	4
Machine Trades.....	5	6	5
Bench Work.....	1	-	-
Structural Work.....	42	41	41
Miscellaneous.....	19	21	18
Unknown.....	2	1	3
Length of Current Spell of Insured Unemployment			
1-4 Weeks.....	28	29	32
5-14 Weeks.....	49	52	46
15 Weeks and over.....	23	19	22