

VALDEZ
A GROWING CITY

By
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Valdez, a name that has now become a household word due to the pipeline terminal activities, finds itself adjusting to the post-construction period. Unlike many other boom towns which have collapsed, Valdez has the opportunity to develop a solid, steady and growing economy.

The pipeline terminal is located approximately four and a half miles across the Bay from the city at a site formerly known as Fort Liscum and in later years as Dayville. The tank farm itself consists of fourteen 510,000 barrel capacity storage tanks, ballast treatment tanks, a power plant, a vapor recovery unit as well as four loading berths for tankers, with space for a fifth in the future. When operations began at the terminal, one and a half tankers a day were being loaded with a three tanker day volume expected soon. The 24 hour a day loading facilities require from 400 to 600 employees to fill the 150 to 200 jobs on three shifts.

This vast terminal complex requires considerable support services. A fleet of tugs is needed to maneuver the large tankers in and out of the berthing facilities. Presently four of the largest tugs on the West Coast and three smaller tugs are operating out of the harbor. The large tugs require crews of from eight to ten, while the smaller ones carry four. Another service is provided by ten marine pilots now living in Valdez who guide the various tankers in and out of Valdez Bay through the Narrows to Prince William Sound. In addition, due to the tremendous increase in tanker and other marine traffic, numerous navigational aids have been installed to help these vessels through the Sound to Valdez. To provide the proper rescue facilities, and equipment, plus servicing the navigational aids, there is a fifty man U.S. Coast Guard installation located in town. Other support services are provided by a full time customs officer, a maritime company that does the paper work such as manifests for the tankers, and a radar

repair company that performs its services for tugs, tankers and the shore-based installations.

At this time prices in Valdez are still "pipeline" inflated and both consumers and business are feeling the pinch, as high wages are a thing of the past. High food prices affect everyone, and the extremely high rents, whether for home or trailer space, make the cost of living excessive. For example, rent for a small two-bedroom unfurnished apartment starts at \$600.00 a month and trailer space has gone from \$45.00 to \$180.00 per month. During the height of the construction period, an attempt was made at rent control without success.

For a few years during the pipeline and terminal construction period, there were thousands of workers in town, business flourished and the money flowed. While it seems quiet now, in reality it is a hive of industry compared to the pre-pipeline days.

Unfortunately, due to heavy damage and unstable ground resulting from the 1964 Alaskan earthquake, Valdez was forced to move the entire town nearly five miles from the original location. The move was carefully planned. Paved streets, water and sewer systems and a sewage disposal plant, all built to top standards, were the groundwork for a new upcoming community. Indeed, the new city was so well planned that children can walk to school, regardless of where they may live, without crossing a busy street. The city is further blessed with ample land available for future growth.

There are three schools that at the present time have seventy-one teachers and clerical and custodial staff of thirty six. The present enrollment is 843 and growing. Their multi-million dollar high school boasts an olympic sized swimming pool that the entire community can enjoy. The city has a 14-bed

hospital that can be expanded and the services of several doctors and a dentist. There is a volunteer fire department, a fire marshal/building inspector and two full-time firemen who provide ambulance service as needed. The police force numbers thirteen officers. They are hoping to enlarge both the City Hall and the maintenance quarters which have been outgrown. The Valdez Library has a full-time librarian and three aides. There is an excellent small boat harbor and the airport, located about four miles from town, is fully black-topped and capable of handling jet traffic. There is a full service air terminal including a large restaurant, cocktail lounge, car-rental agents: all services needed by the air traveler.

The Post Office, the busiest place in town, has processed 3,000 change of address cards since the slow-down of construction. The state facilities in town include a State Trooper detachment, Harborview mental facility, the Department of Transportation Southcentral District office and shops, and the M/V Bartlett that provides Alaska Marine ferry service to Cordova and Whittier.

The city had hoped to have a refinery and petrochemical plant for the processing of Alaska's royalty oil, but that possibility may not be as bright as once thought. However, if successful, there is ample space in the immediate Valdez area.

Through all of the pipeline related construction, every effort has been made to protect the environment. The terminal facilities are putting 75 percent less hydrocarbons into the air than is permissible according to both State and Federal standards. The amount of pollutant that goes into the water is minimal.

After living in Valdez for most of my life, to write a strictly factual account has been a difficult task. I was continually tempted to compare the new Valdez in the new location to the old Valdez in the pre-1964 days. But, before nostalgia gains the upper hand, it appears that Valdez has a bright future blessed with a stable economy. Thanks to the oil industry, Valdez is now well-known which should bring visitors and potential investors for years to come.



Photo: Alaska Historical Library

Area shown was demolished by 1964 Earthquake, and is now part of the Valdez tide flats.