

JULY 10, 2001

Imaginarium Draws on Native Wisdom

The vast state of Alaska gives new meaning to the word "rural." Isolated communities are rich in native cultural knowledge and tradition, but often lack resources for teaching science in the schools and promoting public science literacy. Children grow up with few opportunities to become aware of medical or other scientific careers, and native Alaskans are underrepresented in the sciences.

With a new grant from HHMI, the Imaginarium, a science museum in Anchorage, intends to bring the excitement of do-it-yourself science to villages and communities throughout Alaska.

A Science Outreach Caravan will transport interactive exhibits, science kits, tabletop displays and assembly demonstrations to classrooms and community centers, where school children and their families will be encouraged to touch and try. Teachers and teacher aides will participate in workshops where they will learn ways to engage students in activities that teach the scientific principles of observing, conceptualizing, hypothesizing, and collecting and analyzing data.

Teacher aides, recruited from the local communities, will already be known and respected by the school children's families. Familiar with tribal and native traditions, they will help incorporate into the science curriculum relevant local experience—the speed of a kayak paddled with or against the current, for example, or the life cycle of a familiar fish or bird. The Imaginarium also will seek input from local elders and an advisory committee of cultural leaders, educators and scientists.