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Alaska Hosts Conference on Community and Faith-Based Service

On April 23rd, Director Hein addressed the 2007 Conference on Community and Faith-Based Service hosted by Alaska’s Governor Sarah Palin and Lt. Governor Sean Parnell and various state agencies. The two-day conference’s theme “United to Serve Alaska” reflects the focus on disaster preparedness and the lessons learned from previous natural and man-made disasters.

The conference was widely attended by faith-based and community organizations, service professionals, and volunteers. Beyond merely highlighting partnerships in disaster preparedness, the conference sought to equip participants with information, tools and resources for responding to disasters. In addition attendees received instructions in capacity building, grant-writing, engaging volunteers and leadership development.

Alaska has very quickly become a model state Initiative for others to emulate. The wheels were

set in motion with the creation of a Task Force in 2003 by Lt. Governor Loren Leman. Among other steps, the Task Force recommended creation of a permanent office for faith-based and community initiatives. Soon thereafter, Alaska’s Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives was officially established in January 2005 with the motto and mission to “improve the well-being of Alaskans by strengthening and expanding the contributions of faith-based and community initiatives.”

After only one year’s time, Alaska was commended by the White House as a “role-model State.”

For more information about Alaska’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, visit: www.hss.state.ak.us/fbci. To find out if your state or city has an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, visit: www.fbci.gov.

Alaska: A Leader in Volunteerism

Alaskans have come to be known for their willingness to help neighbors in need – a theme that has been replayed many times throughout its history. A new report released by the Corporation on National and Community Service highlights this fact by showing that Alaskans are volunteering now more than ever.

In 2006, 190,000 Alaskans dedicated 26.6 million volunteer hours of service, a 10.8% increase from 2005. Alaska ranked fourth in

the nation and second in the West for volunteering. In addition, Alaska ranked seventh in the nation for young adult volunteerism and fourth in the nation for the number of college student volunteers.

So engaged are the good people of Alaska that Alaska has ranked third in the nation on the Civic Life Index. The Civic Life Index is a report produced by the Corporation for National Service which measures overall community

participation and is composed of 12 indicators based upon four guiding principals: 1) volunteering for an organization; 2)

neighborhood engagement; 3) voting; and 4) civic and nonprofit infrastructure.

Compassion in Action: Yu'pik Eskimo Village

The small Alaskan Yu'pik Eskimo village of Hooper Bay (population 1133) was declared a disaster after a fire destroyed 35 structures, including: 14 homes, the school, a teachers housing complex, a grocery store, and many other small buildings. At least 71 people lost everything and were left homeless.

Relief efforts were led by churches, faith-based and community organizations, tribal leaders, Alaska Native Regional Corporations, businesses and individuals from around the state who united to

collect, donate, ship, store, organize and disseminate supplies and financial contributions to the citizens of Hooper Bay. Samaritan's Purse donated approximately \$1 million in aid to the community. Alaska VOAD (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), Red Cross, Salvation Army, Food Bank of Alaska, Hooper Bay Covenant Church, Evangelical Covenant Church, Adventists Community Services, Northern Air Cargo and Alaska National Guard each played an invaluable role in the Hooper Bay relief efforts.

Covenant House

As a young girl, Elizabeth lived through a turbulent and tragic family life. Losing her mother at age 14, Elizabeth became a hard core drug addict, abusing both alcohol and drugs. After Elizabeth discovered Covenant House in Anchorage, she began the long road to recovery. Like many drug addicts, Elizabeth struggled to stay clean but with the loving support of Covenant House she has overcome her addictions. In December 2004, she was accepted in to the Rights of Passage program (ROP) and hired at a local restaurant. During her stay at ROP she continued to work on her drug

addiction and worked with the Covenant House Alaska Community Service Center to complete her GED. Graduating in May 2006, Elizabeth has been sober for over 2 years. She is now married with a healthy baby boy and will move into her first home in the fall. Elizabeth says, "I went from no job, no home, no direction, just a lost little girl with a terrible addiction to a loving kind young woman. Someone once said to me that I have such an amazing personality, why do I hide it behind all that darkness. It is an amazing feeling when you allow yourself to see the light."