

# Klein Leading Alaskan RACE

When you call Cristina Klein, she answers.

In the 1960s, she answered President John F. Kennedy's "call to service." As a Peace Corps volunteer, she managed an earthquake relief program from a tent pitched near the Iran-Afghanistan border.

Last year, she answered another call, this time from Alaska Energy Director Percy Frisby. He wanted her to manage **Rural Alaskans Conserve Energy (RACE)**, the state's Rebuild America program.

The goals for RACE are ambitious: saving energy in remote communities accessible only by small plane or boat. The high cost of transporting fuel, combined with extremely cold temperatures, make saving energy a challenge.

Alaska's program focuses on schools and other large buildings in villages that typically have 500 or fewer residents. RACE also aims to teach energy conservation to the next generation.

Originally from San Francisco, and armed with an MA in Economics from the University of California, Berkeley, Klein has administered community programs in Chicago; worked with public television in Khartoum, Sudan; and taught English in Osaka, Japan.

After working as a gem dealer in South America ("rubies are my favorites"), she moved to the University of Alaska, Anchorage, where she was a

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researcher, writer and adjunct instructor of writing. She has also worked as an economist for the Alaska Department of Labor and as a project coordinator for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

RACE has distributed an informational brochure statewide, run public service announcements on Alaska Public Radio and produced a booklet on retrofitting. They also filmed a video on energy conservation that features Juneau magician Jeff Brown.

So far, RACE has performed energy audits in six villages in Interior Alaska. When schools reopen in the fall after residents return from subsistence hunting and fishing, Rebuild auditors will begin site visits to approximately 210 villages over the next two and a half years.

“We want to help,” Klein said. “Energy savings mean money for staff, books, and equipment.”

She noted that the school building is usually the largest building in a village. The villages are mostly powered by oil, which is expensive and time-consuming to fly in to the remote locations.

A unique challenge for RACE is dealing with the huge distances between villages. “Our 210 villages are scattered over 586,000 square miles, an area as large as 10 Western states combined,” Klein said. Compared to Maryland, which has almost 500 people per square mile, Alaska has one.

Disposing of fluorescent tubes containing lead and mercury gas was an obstacle for rural communities until the environmental office at the U.S. Army’s Fort Richardson partnered with RACE to recycle mercury gas and dispose of crushed glass tubes.

Klein is arranging a Rebuild America Celebration for September in Anchorage to promote energy conservation and RACE’s program. She promises that the mosquitoes, which she jokingly says are Alaska’s state bird, will be gone by then.



Cristina Klein, RACE coordinator, on the Akiak village runway