



Mid-October, Village Public Safety Officers and Troopers with Native Heritage were at a VPSO booth set up at the Alaska Federation of Natives conference taking place in Anchorage, Alaska. As every year since the start of AFN in 1966, Native Alaskans from across the state have converged together for a conference to address issues pertinent to their cultural wellbeing.

In the past few years, the Department of Public Safety, armed with the Governor's support with his campaigns "Safe Homes, Strong Families" and "Choose Respect", is increasing the law enforcement presence in rural Alaska. The Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program has been highlighted as a way to reduce alcohol and drug abuse in the villages. More importantly, it is a key component of attempting to curb the astonishingly high number of domestic violence incidents as well as sexual assaults across the state.

"The people keep coming up to us and commenting on how they don't have a VPSO in their village and that they want one," said VPSO Winfred Olanna of Brevig Mission. "We've gotten a lot of people saying that."

Olanna has worked as a VPSO in Brevig Mission, a village of 400 on the Seward Peninsula, since 2008. When he started he was the only VPSO and the village had a couple Village Police Officers. Now there are two VPSOs in Brevig Mission. The newer VPSO will begin conducting his own shifts next month.

Olanna says he notices that the village is calmer when there is a VPSO on duty and available to villagers. He also notes that it can be difficult on VPSOs when incidents involve family members. Operating as a VPSO has at times caused friction within his own family.

The biggest problems in Brevig Mission, Olanna believes, are drug and alcohol importation and assaults. "It's almost always a boyfriend-girlfriend situation— domestic violence."

At the AFN conference in his address, Governor Sean Parnell reaffirmed his dedication to the VPSO program. He pledged to set aside funding for 15 new VPSO positions as well as budget a million dollars to secure and improve VPSO housing in villages.

Throughout the conference there was a common theme of unity between the state and the native communities. Remarks and speeches from panelists frequently turned to fostering and maintaining strong ties between the two entities. The Department of Public Safety, especially through the VPSO program, is going great lengths to close the gap.



Commissioner Masters was the 2011 recipient of the Glenn Godfrey Law Enforcement Award. The award is named for the late Glenn Godfrey, Colonel and Director of the Alaska State Troopers and Alaska Commissioner of Public Safety. The award recognizes an Alaska Native law enforcement officer at the federal, state or local level who has shown outstanding dedication to the safety of the public in any location within Alaska, often requiring heroic courage in the face of danger.

Alaska State Troopers, U.S. Marshals and Village Public Safety Officers spoke with Conference attendees. State, federal and local law enforcement agencies are making a push to foster and maintain better relationships with villages across the state in hopes of improving public safety.

