



# Common Ground

## *Finding the balance between Troopers and Rural Alaskans*

On the very un-Alaskan January day (temps in the 40s with rain), Trooper Gordon Young, stationed at the Dillingham Post, loaded up in his patrol vehicle and made the drive to the only village he could get to without jumping in an airplane. With no phones ringing, the sloppy, slippery, wet day was perfect to go out and make a school visit.

The small school in Aleknagik, Alaska, is a mix of approximately two and a half dozen students ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade. A room of big eyes stared at Trooper Young as he stood in front of a classroom.

“Is that a gun?”

“Can I see your tazer? Can you taze me?”

“Have you ever been shot?”

“Yes. No. NO! Yes,” Trooper Young answered in quick succession. “I was hit by shrapnel after a bullet hit my AR-15 site.” Before he could get further into the story behind the wound from about seven years ago the kids were on to other topics.

Trooper Young first came to Alaska to work for the Dillingham Police Department. He worked for the local PD for close to three years before becoming a Trooper in 2007. Hailing from rural Wyoming, Trooper Young feels right at home in bush Alaska. He worked in Soldotna, Kotzebue and Cantwell before transferring back to Dillingham where his son is now a police officer for Dillingham PD. He says he prefers the pace of things away from the big cities.

“I really like doing the whole community policing thing with kids. You can really make an impact when you start interacting with them while they are still young,” explained Trooper Young after leaving the school. “I go and just talk about basic safety and let them ask questions. It’s good.”

The Dillingham Alaska State Trooper Post is allotted one Sergeant and three Troopers, one position is currently vacant. Dillingham Troopers primarily cover seven rural communities. Dillingham Troopers also share coverage on the King Salmon Region and Iliamna Lake region, both currently only has one Trooper assigned to them.

There aren’t many Troopers to do a lot of proactive work but when there is a lull in crime, Troopers carve



Trooper Young, stopped on the new bridge near Aleknagik Lake, only has the luxury of driving his patrol vehicle in and around Dillingham. In the majority of the Villages he services, he has to fly to. Once there, he either gets a ride from a Village Public Safety Officer or walks.

out the time. Community policing is an important part of working in Rural Alaska. When back up can be hours away, you have to be able to work with people in the community and they have to be able to trust you. To foster those positive relations, Troopers do school visits, participate in potlaches and community events. They also practice a subsistence lifestyle, learn the local customs and get to know the people.

“One man didn’t even talk to me for two years. He said it would be pointless,” said Trooper Young. “But after that he saw that I cared and was committed to the community. By the time I left two years later he told me I did a good job. One elder even gave me a Yupik name. That is a big deal. She named me Mr. Minista after another person who she thought worked hard and was a good person— always called me Mr. Minista and my wife Mrs. Minista. That was a great honor.”



Trooper Young met with elementary students at the Aleknagik School to talk about age appropriate personal safety. They talked about wearing helmets, clothing to wear for the cold and dark and even how to stay safe while walking on slippery roads.



Middle and high school aged student peppered Trooper Young with questions about everything from minimum requirements to apply to most memorable moments of being a Trooper. If you are interested in applying, visit our website at [www.alaskastatetrooper.com](http://www.alaskastatetrooper.com).



## Communities Serviced by Dillingham Trooper Post

	Population
Aleknagik.....	221
Clark’s Point.....	62
Ekwok.....	131
New Stuyahok.....	513
Koliganek.....	209
Manokotak.....	413
Twin Hills.....	74
Togiak* .....	846

\*Two Troopers are stationed in the community that work two weeks on, two weeks off. Dillingham Troopers cover the community when those troopers are on leave or need assistance.