

# Galena making progress in flood recovery

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GALENA — One year later and the town of Galena is still a work in progress, but it's a community again instead of just a construction zone.

Galena was the largest and worst-hit of the Yukon River communities flooded last year. It's is a rare Alaska construction project that didn't get completed in a single abbreviated season. About 10 percent of the town's 500 people over-wintered outside of Galena this year because their homes weren't ready last year.

On Thursday, a new construction season was under way with about a dozen, construction projects in process. More than 500 construction volunteers from various Christian charities are expected during summer, most working for two-week shifts.

Electric generators and power saws were the dominant sounds Thursday around the construction sites, but there also were noises of children laughing and playing on four-wheelers that were almost entirely absent last year. This time last year, the city was still working to provide basic services like electricity and potable water.

Since then, most public facilities have been repaired, although the road to the dump is rerouted, said City Manager Shanda Huntington. In May this year, the city refilled the town indoor pool, a major morale booster.

"That's one of the highlights. It's one of the reasons we've worked so hard, to get that pool up and running for the kids," Huntington said. "There are 40 to 50 kids a night in that pool."

City Mayor Jon Korta also mentioned recreation when asked about the state of public facilities. The town softball fields were completely inundated with ice and river water last spring and haven't been rebuilt.

"It's a small project, but it's probably got the most support and enthusiasm of any of the projects. We want to put our ball field back. We had hoped to have them back this year."

Next week, Galena again will be the halfway point for the Yukon River 800. Last year, organizers extended the annual river boat race downriver to spare the community the effort of hosting. The race is traditionally accompanied by a softball tournament, which will take place on a secondary field in Galena this year, Korta said.

Elders also have returned to Galena. Six of the nine elders who lived at the regional Yukon Kuskokwim Elders Home before the flood have returned, director Agnes Sweetsir said.

'Santa boxes'



## GALENA

Mike Zellmer, of Michigan, with the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission works with a staple gun on the underside of a new home Thursday June 12, 2014 in Galena. The United Methodist Volunteers in Mission are one of several groups working to rebuild the community after last year's record floods.

Because the town is several hundred miles from the nearest road or rail, Galena residents get construction materials by Yukon River barge or, at much greater expense, by air freight.

Construction supplies are in abundance in Galena, said Karl Edwards who heads the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management effort in Galena. That's in contrast to last year when they were scarce.

"It was awful, just awful. The hardest part is getting people who aren't from Alaska to understand how difficult things are in this state," he said.

This year, many front yards held barge-delivered wooded boxes filled with lumber, insulation and other construction materials.

Galena resident Theresa Burley, stopped by the flood-damaged cabin of her younger brother, Arley Yaksa, to look over the construction supplies in what she jokingly called the "Santa boxes."

She told three volunteers with the Samaritan's Purse working on the house to make sure to put the materials to good use. Then, looking at one box, she questioned whether carpeting was really appropriate for her bachelor brother.

Her brother is living in Fairbanks at the Northward building until his home is complete. Burley said she found out recently that her brother's house would qualify for assistance.

"We were going to break his heart and tell him not to come back, because we thought they weren't going to fix it," she said. "Last night, I called my niece and she said, 'Somebody's pounding away on Arley's house.' So, I came down here to find out. ... I'm so happy."

### **A high elevation**

Before 2013, log cabins were common in Galena, as were elevated buildings on wooden pilings. This construction season, a new model is based on a design from the Fairbanks-based Cold Climate Housing Research Center.

Two such houses were in construction Thursday morning. One started two days ago already had been framed and placed on I-beams above the pilings.

Steel pilings are a common feature in both new and rebuilt Galena homes. The buildings can qualify for federal hazard mitigation funding if their owners buy flood insurance and elevate to 136 1/2 feet above sea level, one foot above the crest of last year's flood.

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