



OF COURSE, ANCHORAGE.

Alaskans never asked why we opened a mission in their state, just why we didn't do it sooner.

BY KAREN MATTHIAS

Ankara?" The voice from the SIGNET help desk sounded confused.
 "No, Anchorage...Alaska." I repeated.
 "We don't have a mission in Alaska."

Colleagues who have opened a consulate in a remote place may have met with similar confusion in Ottawa. Some of my mail went to Ankara, and one person even asked me why Canada would open a mission in the Canadian north. Alaskans, on the other hand, never asked why we were opening the mission, just why we didn't do it sooner.

The Consulate of Canada in Anchorage, which sounds rather grand for a small Political, Economic Relations and Public Affairs office with one Canadian and two local staff housed in a business centre, was opened as part of DFAIT's Enhanced Representation Initiative in the U.S. In 2003 and 2004, we opened eight missions and appointed 17 more honorary consuls to strengthen our trade and advocacy efforts at the regional level.

I arrived with my laptop to an empty office in August 2004. Fortunately, Rudy Brueggemann, a very capable locally engaged political, economic relations and public affairs officer at the Consulate General in Seattle, had

won the competition for the position in Anchorage, and he arrived the same day. I thought we would be able to stay under the radar for a few weeks while we set up the office and planned our strategy for making contacts in Anchorage. Instead, we were invited to a black tie dinner celebrating U.S. Senator Ted Stevens the following night. It had not occurred to me that I might need a formal dress when packing two suitcases that would see me through the summer and into the beginning of winter before my personal effects arrived.

Between being formally introduced at the dinner and calling on the Governor's office the next day, we soon realized that word of our arrival was all over town. So instead of developing a strategy for making contacts, we had to develop a strategy for time management in order to accommodate all the invitations we received. I could not have asked for a warmer welcome from Alaskans.

And this makes sense, because Alaskans know Canada. Not only is it impossible to drive from Alaska to the Lower 48 (as the continental United States is called here) without travelling through Canada, you can't even drive from Anchorage to the state capital, Juneau, without going through Canada. In fact, technically you can't