

HB

248

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248</SUBJECT><COMM>HTRA27</COMM></TARGET>

Alaska State Legislature

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Representative Alan Dick

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Sponsor Statement

HB 248: Al Wright Airport (Minto)

Al Wright was born at Tanana Crossing on April 26, 1925 to Arthur and Myrtle Wright, missionaries in the Minto Flats area. Arthur Wright was Athabascan Indian and Myrtle was white. Mrs. Wright was one of the first nurses in the villages. In 1930 the family moved to Minto.

The Wright family lived a subsistence lifestyle. In Minto his dad tried to start a school. He had a hard time because the kids had to go back to seasonal subsistence camps. Each child would bring a stick of wood as tuition. When the wood ran out that ended the school day.

When Al was nine, they moved to Nenana where his father started work in the shipyard. His family also cut and sold wood for \$8.00 a cord with a Sears&Roebuck wood saw. They dragged the wood with a model-T vehicle back to the village to sell.

Al was 15 when he started in construction on defense projects all over Interior Alaska. He had no formal training and learned as he went along. His skills were in high demand on the defense projects, however he wanted to join the Army. The only way he could leave his job was to quit the construction work and get drafted. When he got out of the Army, he found out he could get his pilot's license with the G.I. bill. He originally started for fun, but never got away from flying.

His first plane was a 65 Taylorcraft. One day a man asked to charter him to pick up furs. He said, "boy, this is the way to make money." From then on he started hauling trappers and developing a business. His first charter was \$20.00 an hour with fuel, plane and pilot. He taught himself to fly with floats. With no formal training, his first flight was to pick up a dying man in a Minto fish camp. He flew about 200 hours before he was forced to get an official float

rating. He had trouble getting ratings and licenses, because he had little education. He struggled his whole life because he never learned how to read well, write or spell. He quit school after the sixth grade as he took on more seasonal work with the family.

Al started Wright's Air Service in 1950 which continued to grow in Interior Alaska. His focus was on maintaining high standards with maintenance and with his employees. He was the critical link for scheduled mail and charter flights to about 20 villages. Wright's Air today is a well-known charter operation in the Interior, supporting government surveys, seasonal camps, firefighting, land surveying and hunting expeditions. In 1983 Al sold his airline to long-time friend and pilot, Bob Burcell. Bob continues to run the airline with the same old time values, kindness and respect Al had for his people and villages.