

EDUCATION ON ALASKA RESOURCES

**CAREER FACT**

**20 fastest growing professions**

1. Biomedical engineers
2. Network systems and data communications analysts
3. Home health aides
4. Personal and home care aides
5. Financial examiners
6. Medical scientists, except epidemiologists
7. Physician assistants
8. Skin care specialists
9. Biochemists and biophysicists
10. Athletic trainers
11. Physical therapist aides
12. Dental hygienists
13. Veterinary technologists and technicians
14. Dental assistants
15. Computer software engineers, applications
16. Medical assistants
17. Physical therapist assistants
18. Veterinarians
19. Self-enrichment education teachers
20. Compliance officers

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics and Division of Occupational Outlook

# 'Mining' cupcakes and cookies

*Fun activities help teachers, students better know business*

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Alaska Resource Education is all about just that, education about Alaska's natural resources industries.

The nonprofit organization, formerly known as AMEREF (Alaska Mineral and Energy Resource Education Fund), is working to educate teachers and students about Alaska's resources and careers in the sectors of mining, energy and forestry.

AMEREF was created in 1984 through several entities, including mining industries — such as Alaska Women in Mining, the state office of mineral development and Mineral Information Institute, and the Alaska Department of Education — after professionals working in the industry realized a lack of mineral education in the schools. So a curriculum was put together that met the requirements at the time for teaching and it was housed with the department of education.

According to Michelle Brunner, executive director of Alaska Resource Education, about seven or eight years ago AMEREF took the curriculum back into the organization.

It has about 140 curriculum activities encompassing the mineral, energy and forestry industries, which teachers can utilize in their classrooms. The curriculum is directed for kindergarteners to eighth-graders but can also be adapted by high school science teachers for students up to grade 12.

Teachers can request a kit from Alaska Resource Education at no charge and it's packed with Alaska specific information about the three fields. The kit includes a 40-piece rock and mineral set with Alaska-specific samples, a mineral testing kit and magnifying loupe, and additional resource materials such as DVDs, CDs, magazines, books, posters and maps.

To facilitate teachers in taking full advantage of the kit, Alaska Resource Education sets up training sessions as needed in which the educators can attend a 15-hour training course called "Rock & Roll Around Alaska." The training is approved by the University of Alaska Anchorage, Fairbanks and Southeast campuses for a teacher recertification credit. So, teachers can gain one graduate level credit, learn curriculum that's "fun and hands-on," and they receive the free resource kit.

"What I like to say is the resource kit is really the icing on the cake and the curriculum is really what we want to get used in the classroom. As you know, Alaska is a resource-rich state," Brunner said. "We like to ensure that we're educating not just students but teachers as well about resource specific issues."

**Educating educators**

Alaska Resource Education notices a lot of turnover in teachers especially in rural Alaska and Brunner estimated as many as 25 percent who come have never been to the state and don't have any history or knowledge about the state. She points out



Teachers can request a 40-piece resource kit at no charge from Alaska Resource Education. The kit is Alaska specific materials to help teach kids about Alaska's natural resources.

ALASKA RESOURCE EDUCATION / COURTESY PHOTO



TAMMY JUDD / ALASKA NEWSPAPERS

Michelle Brunner, executive director of Alaska Resources Education, stands next to a banner with the newly rebranded name of the nonprofit, which formerly was named AMEREF (Alaska Mining and Energy Resource Education Fund).

that teachers spend eight hours a day with students.

"It's incumbent upon us, I believe, as a state to try and help those educators better understand who we are and what the state's about so that they better educate our students, because ultimately the students will stay, the teachers will go," Brunner said.

In addition to the teacher training, Alaska Resource Education participates in community events and activities that help students learn about Alaska's natural resources and some offer opportunities for students to interview people in various career fields in mining, energy and forestry sectors.

In March during the Alaska Miners Association meeting in Fairbanks, a group of Girl Scouts participated in a program called "Minor miners" in

which the students got to "mine a cookie" while learning about mineral industry. They got to go around and learn fun facts at certain booths and they filled out a paper telling where they've been and three things they learned.

The organization also offers students opportunities to interview people working in resource industries. They bring in people such as camp cooks up to Department of Natural Resources personnel.

"We have them come in and we give the students a bunch of questions that they get to ask and then they ask some of their own and they start to understand about level of education, 'what made you decide you wanted to be a helicopter pilot?' 'When did you first begin?' those kinds of things, so they learn about all different kinds of careers that are not-degreed all the way up to degreed that are working directly for a mining company or are doing support services, or doing permitting," Brunner said. "So we want to show a broad range, across the sector.

"One of my favorite things to say to students is look, if you don't agree and you say, I don't want to work for the industry, but an industry comes into your backyard, then I suggest you go work for those that maybe try to make sure it's permitted properly, or you go and you do the side that says, 'Hey, you will stand by the law,' you be an MSHA (mining safety and health) inspector or an OSHA (occupational safety and health administration) inspector. Now you're the one walking and saying, 'Hey, you better be doing this right,'" she said.

Students will tell Brunner that they hadn't thought of that, they assume they have to work for the company, but they don't, she said.

"You can still work in the sector, and you can still be engaged, you can still make a living in the state of Alaska. You don't have to move Outside."

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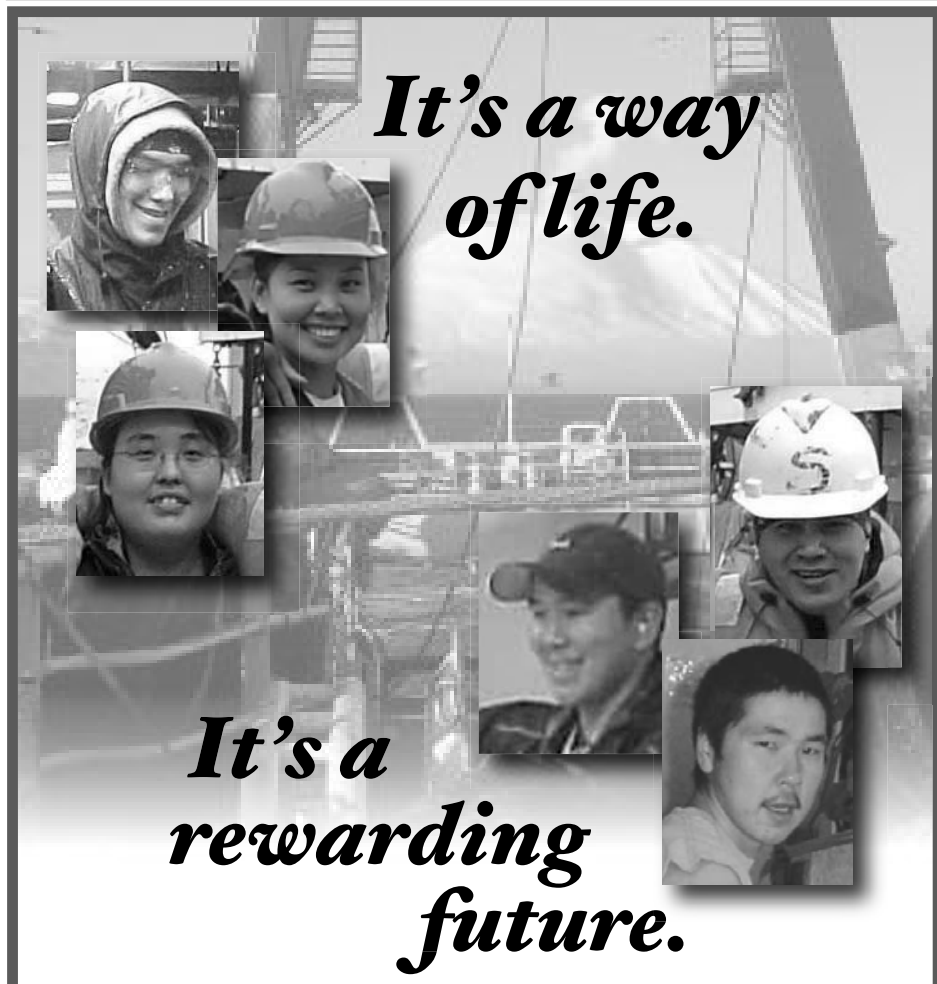
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**Trina Landlord**, originally from Mountain Village, serves as the family school liaison for the Alaska Humanities Forum program.

COURTESY PHOTO

## COLLEGE

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the chance to temporarily trade places to learn about other Alaska lifestyles.

Criteria used to select the students and other information is available on the nonprofit's Web site at [www.akhf.org](http://www.akhf.org).

The program will also include a cultural immersion trip for professors, who will travel to existing rural Alaska culture camps in the summer in hopes that they'll become more familiar with the differences between village traditions and city lifestyles.

Those professors will hopefully serve as mentors for the rural students, Evans-Dinneen said.

Also, a community member in the student's village will travel with the student to the campus during their junior year. The community member will work with the family to let them know about the student's college options -- the student won't have to attend UAA or the Job Corps -- and will help to keep their grades up at home.

In Anchorage, the students in the program will have another contact who can offer loan tips, class-work advice and administrative help.

Trina Landlord, raised in Mountain Village in Southwest but now living in Anchorage, will serve as the family school liaison for the program.

Landlord has a huge family, but only her uncle, James Landlord, traditional chief in the village of 770, has a college degree, she said.

Homesick and lonely

Some Alaska Natives have trouble going to college because they get lonely after leaving their village. Some might be overwhelmed by the size of the campus and their classrooms.

"So often, young people come in from rural communities and have a desire to go to school, get educated and help their people," Landlord said. "But I've seen them get homesick, or they get lost and become invisible."

The program will create a structure that will help the rural students succeed, she said.

Landlord herself went to UAA for four years, but never graduated.

She started a year later than she wanted to, delaying her studies because she found the administrative hurdles and paperwork for loans and scholarships intimidating, she said.

"I didn't understand the resources available, and I didn't quite know what I wanted to do when I got the university," she said.

She left after four years without a bachelor's degree, taking what she called a "dream job" for the Alaska Federation of Natives, where she did such things as organizing the annual Elders and Youth Conference and helped launch the Alaska Marketplace.

She might have started UAA a year earlier if she could have participated in a program like the one she'll be working on, she said.

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## MINING

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### New program

Alaska Resource Education is giving a new program a test run later this month. For the program called "Energy Einstein," they will bring a group of Anchorage middle school science students to the Petroleum Club for a day with the topic of Drilling 101. The students will get to "mine a cupcake" to explore for "oil."

Shell is going to come do a presentation, Brunner said, and they're putting together an industry panel with a roughneck, someone from accounting, and another from the state.

"We're going to have a nice broad range of industry panelists for the students to ask questions about potential career opportunities," she said.

Prior to last year, the nonprofit AMEREF was run by borrowed staff from the Resource Development Council. Brunner, who had worked in the industry for years and was on the board of AMEREF for three years, challenged the board to do a better job at marketing itself. The board accepted her challenge and appointed her as executive director.

The first thing she did was move AMEREF out from underneath RDC.

"I felt that just being under an organization that's inherently considered resource development is not the same screen that I think teachers look through, so I felt that in order to reach our target audience, and that being educators, and through educators, students, we really had to be a standalone education organization," she said.

She renamed the nonprofit Alaska Resource Education and rebranded it with a new logo.

Now it has two staff members, Brunner, and Beth Klein, the education director, who handles trainings.

The two were in Kotzebue this month during the Northwest mining conference, and Klein planned to be in the classroom doing activities with fifth- to 12th-grade students including a "jelly belly" geography activity. "Kids just love it," Brunner said.

They have a teacher training planned in Southeast Alaska, and Brunner said she hopes to get to Southwest Alaska sometime next year, contingent on funding.

For more about the Alaska Resource Education visit its Web site at [www.akresource.org](http://www.akresource.org).

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