Kodiak's First Social Worker Coming To Town

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Mary Donaldson/KMXT

Kodiak’s first ever social worker will be making her way back to town to participate in this weekend’s Aging Connection Conference. Mary Donaldson has more.

Though Ella Craig, now 88, has been retired for many years from her field in social work, she continues to volunteer her time to social services around the state. She is Kodiak’s first social worker, and says it was seeing the hard times people dealt with after the Great Depression that drew her into this field of work.

(Craig 2 :35s “…grew into it.”)

She says she was a social worker for a few years on the East Coast before she was contacted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska to see if she would be interested in working for them. The thirty-three-old was excited to make the journey to the territory, as Alaska

was not yet a state.

(Craig 1 :44s “…of 1953”)

Once she arrived in Kodiak, she says the mayor at that time, Lee Bettinger, was happy to welcome her to town. He even set her up with housing, which was hard to find, though she says that at the time, the Aleutian Homes housing project was taking off.

Being the first social worker in town, and one of the few in the whole Alaska territory kept her very busy. She says while in Kodiak, she mainly worked with the Alaska Native population, since social services provided to them were scarce.

(Craig 4 :26s “…things I was helping with.”)

Craig says she only stayed in Kodiak for a little over two years, as the BIA had decided to combine their Kodiak and Anchorage offices, leading her to move to Anchorage.
She says that although she was relocated to Anchorage, she still traveled to Kodiak from time to time.

(Craig 5 :15s “…all those areas.”)

She says the most rewarding part of her job has been working in her field long enough to see some of her clients come full circle.

(Craig 6 :37s “…over generations.”)

Craig retired from the BIA after 34 years of work, and went to work at Providence Medical Center for another 6 years before retiring again. She has been volunteering her time since then to various senior and aging programs.

Craig will be arriving in town Friday afternoon to participate in this weekend’s Aging Connection Conference at the Kodiak Senior Center.
She will be a senior advocate speaking on aging issues and talking with other

seniors about how to accept the aging process.

Craig received her master’s degree in social work from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the early 1950’s.

I’m Mary Donaldson. ###