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Outside audience to explore Alaska

By MARK QUINER
Peninsula Clarion

Paul Gray thinks Alaskans have a healthy balance between hard work and hard play. It is easy for him to imagine a person working on a power generator, trading the work jacket for the fishing one and heading for the river to catch a salmon.

And now Gray, producer of the Exploring Alaska television show, is going to bring that image — and many others — to a national audience. Gray signed a contract with Markwell Media Productions, a Kentucky-based distribution, syndication and media consulting company, to have his show broadcast to more than 50 million viewers across the United States.

The show, which currently airs on ABC affiliates across Alaska, will air on the Colours channel as part of the Dish

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network's basic package starting later this month. In June, it will also be aired on the America One Network and the America One Sports Network. Markwell is also negotiating to have the show broadcast in Japan and Europe.

In an effort to expand the reach of his show, Gray attended the National Association of Tele-

vision Program Executives in Las Vegas. It was there he connected with Markwell.

"It's not just the scenery — (the show) really gives a feeling of what it is like to be an Alaskan," said Mike Markwell, owner of Markwell media productions. "You can really feel from the show that it is produced by someone who is passionate about Alaska."

The show will focus on travel with a cultural emphasis, he said.

Originally, Exploring Alaska was produced to reach an Alaska

audience, Gray said. But with a new national audience he will focus on showing the diversity, heritage and culture of people in the state. The goal is to entice them to explore the vast offerings of Alaska — vicariously through their television, he said. Or maybe they will even be inspired to take a trip, he said.

"It's to show how people work here and play here," he said.

Exploring Alaska started in 1997 as the Kenai River Show, focusing on activities related to

the river. But as interest grew, it evolved into the Kenai Peninsula Show. Gray said he soon realized that, due to the vastness of the state, the people living here have a hard time learning about other Alaska communities. So he used his show as a way to connect communities.

"It's about catching people's emotions and sharing that with other people," he said.

This mission will continue as the show enters a new phase of its life. Gray said most viewers have seen the bears and moun-

tains on television and in coffee table books. So he will now work to connect the rest of the country, and maybe even the world, with Alaska's people, he said.

One year, Gray did a show on the Native Youth Olympics and followed peninsula athletes from the Kenaitze Indian Tribe's team — an experience he said he'll draw on in future shows.

"There's not much known about them," he said. "I used (the Kenaitze team) to explain themselves to other people. They were very appreciative of it."