



## Always Ready in Old Harbor

**O**ld Harbor, Alaska, is one of the 12,000 unreached communities of the North Pacific Crescent. The picture above captures something of its isolation, mystery and beauty.

In most small communities around the world, locals are often initially suspicious of newcomers. So when InterAct's Mark and Heather Overbeek joined this village of 220 people, they had to earn trust. How they are doing it ... and what the results have been ... comprise a story of missionary endeavor worthy of the telling.

Mark and Heather recently wrote that they want to "affect community life in positive ways" and "help the community develop and thrive." Opportunities to put that into practice are never far away. Sometimes these opportunities are born out of tragedy.

For many Alaska Native villages, death is rarely far from the daily reality. So it is with Old Harbor. The Overbeeks knew that ... sort of.

"I wasn't prepared for how close to the death you are," Mark said. Instead of the usual hearing that "somebody died" and then going to the funeral home," Mark said, "here, you are part of the whole scene."

Mark vividly recalls the day he arrived at the site of a teenager's suicide and helped carry him out of the house covered with blood and moaning. The 15-year-old died shortly after.

To be available at such a grievous tragedy requires a servant attitude, which opened doors for Mark. A brother and niece of the



On a rare sunny day in Old Harbor, the Overbeek family poses for the camera.

young man came to stay with Mark and Heather for a few weeks. Then the school district asked if they would be available a few hours a day to build relationships with students.

“Their main focus was to have someone connected with the students,” Mark said, “so if a kid goes into crisis, there are people who can recognize it and intervene before suicide happens.”

Now Mark serves as a *Family Services Worker*, spending time every day in the school, “going in and out of classes and helping out wherever I can.” He also teaches small-engine repair, a class that enables strong connection with the young men of the village. Such connections, and the relationships they foster, have saved the life of more than one young man in InterAct’s ministry. They may well save a life in Old Harbor.

In fact, one junior high student frequently invites friends to the Overbeeks’ home. “He has given us opportunities to meet lots of

kids,” Mark said. “He talks about it like it’s his house.”

Not just students but adult citizens of Old Harbor have come to trust Mark and Heather.

“Right before we moved here,” Mark recalled, “I had gone to the village for a visit and was in the store. A guy came up to me and asked me who I was. He proceeded to yell at me and point his finger in my face,



Mark’s mechanical background positions him for a unique ministry to the young men.

‘We don’t need you here. We have our own religion. If you move down here you better stay in your house. We have ways of getting rid of people like you.’”

But recently the same man asked Mark to help him on a home-improvement project. “When we see each other now, he is friendly toward me,” Mark says.

Mark also serves on the Village Response Team, a group that attends to village emergencies. Heather initiated a Produce Co-op to help families secure fresher produce at a better price.



Even little hands help sort snow peas for the Produce Co-op.

Leading women's and men's Bible studies, managing a community shop where vehicle owners can do their own repairs, and offering kids day camps are other venues for serving the community. But activities aside, Mark and Heather find most encouraging the signs that their lives are bearing fruit.

Like the time one man approached Mark.

"Joseph<sup>1</sup> asked if I wanted to go hunting with him," Mark recalls. "Afterward, we were sitting on our Hondas by the trail and he asked 'How is your mission going? Are

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<sup>1</sup> Not his real name

you doing Bible studies or anything like that?"

That conversation led to a Bible study in the Gospel of John. At chapter three, the story of Nicodemus, Joseph prayed to receive Christ.

"He and I have been in a discipleship relationship ever since," Mark said. His wife is also growing in her relationship with God."

One evening during worship at the Overbeeks', Joseph was working through a study of God's Word, and something struck his heart. In the Bible study booklet *Help for the Home*,<sup>2</sup> Joseph read a story about an abuse issue and he said, 'That's me. That's what happened to me.'"

Joseph went on to attend a *Heart's Going Toward Wellness* event<sup>3</sup> and is continuing to pursue God's purposes in His life.

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<sup>2</sup> InterAct publishes this as part of a complete Bible study curriculum.

<sup>3</sup> InterAct sponsors these events to offer healing for wounded hearts.