



Cup'ik/Yup'ik Mechanic/Welders from Chevak, Hooper Bay, Kongiganak, Napakiak, Toksook Bay and Scammon Bay Train with American Honda Technicians in Rural Alaska

Four technicians from American Honda traveled to Alaskan village to collaborate with local CVRF mechanics in week-long Marine and ATV training

ANCHORAGE, Alaska, August 14, 2024 – Last week, Cup'ik/Yup'ik mechanic/welders from Chevak, Hooper Bay, Kongiganak, Napakiak, Toksook Bay and Scammon Bay came together to attend a training in Scammon Bay from August 5-9, hosted by [Coastal Villages Region Fund](#) (CVRF) and [American Honda Motor Company, Inc.](#) Four Honda technicians traveled out to remote rural Alaska for the first time to teach and learn from these lifelong self-taught mechanic/welders.



Scammon Bay, Alaska (Photo by Dan Redfield)

The CVRF Mechanic/Welder Program has come a long way since its inception. When mechanics first started working in the late 2000s, they worked part-time with limited access to parts and other necessities to get a machine running. They often had to wait a month for parts to make it to the village, and due to the limited capacity, residents would have to ship machines back to vendors in Bethel or Anchorage to get diagnosed and fixed – an additional expense for residents on top of an already high cost of living.

Mechanics also had limited training in welding and there were less than 10 mechanics in other communities to draw on for support. During this program's infancy, mechanics would draw on each other for help. Mechanics like Theodore Brown of Eek and the late Herman Beaver of Kwigillingok would often travel to other communities to help train for welding.



If there is one thing CVRF mechanics are known for, it is their big hearts for wanting to serve the people in their communities, and their humbleness about staying quiet and not bragging about helping others. This is also a trait taught in the Yup'ik culture. Their work speaks for itself and living in the village brings intrinsic knowledge of the importance of having a machine to conduct their everyday lives, and most importantly, their subsistence lifestyles.

“We are extremely grateful to Honda for its ongoing partnership and continued support of CVRF’s communities,” said Eric Deakin, CEO of Coastal Villages Region Fund. “We have been able to expand our relationship with Honda so that Alaskans can save time and money on repairs and support our traditional ways of living off the land. It is impressive that a global company such as Honda invests in creative partnerships like ours to maintain the cultural and subsistence needs of even the most remote communities of the world.”



Aaron Dull of Napakiak working on an outboard motor. (Photo by Dan Redfield)

In 2019, CVRF signed a partnership agreement with American Honda that allows CVRF staff to provide service and warranty work on Honda ATVs, UTVs, outboards and more. As part of this partnership, Community Service Centers in Eek, Kipnuk and Scammon Bay have been able to perform warranty work after receiving the required training through the CVRF mechanic/welder program.

“Product reliability is always a priority for Honda, and it’s even more important in remote areas, typified by many Alaskan communities,” said Jeremy Merzlak, Aftersales Experience Division Director at American Honda. “A big part of ensuring reliability, especially in the long term, is a well-organized maintenance and repair program, something that we’ve worked hard to create with our CVRF partners. This collaboration benefits these mechanics and their customers, but it’s also an opportunity for us to learn from their experiences in extreme conditions. That knowledge ultimately



results in improved products, creating a circular positive process that has already proven to be extremely valuable. We look forward to its continued success.”



From left to right: Matthew Cholok of Chevak, Darrell Walker of Hooper Bay, Honda Technician Norman Henkel, Paul Joe Jr. of Hooper Bay, and Clifford Kaganak Jr. of Scammon Bay. (Photo by Dan Redfield)

This year’s training follows a 2020 American Honda training in Torrance, California, that several CVRF mechanics/welders traveled to attend, where they received training on warranty work and repairs in a faster-paced environment than their respective Alaskan communities and surrounding villages.

“We have the ability to perform warranty work and can order directly from vendors, and parts show up in a week’s time, which is more efficient,” said Thomas Julius of Toksook Bay, CVRF Mechanic/Welder of 18 years. “Starting out part-time, getting more training and seeing the program grow has been a game changer not only for us as mechanics but also for the residents that we serve.”

To learn more about CVRF and its mechanic/welder program, visit www.coastalvillages.org.

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About Coastal Villages Region Fund

Coastal Villages Region Fund (CVRF) uses Bering Sea fishing rights granted to it by the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program to foster sustainable and diversified local economies in western Alaska. CVRF is a 501(c)(4) Alaska non-profit corporation and operates in 20 member communities along the west coast of Alaska, from Scammon Bay to Platinum. CVRF generates the money to fund its programs by harvesting fish in the Bering Sea with its own fleet of vessels.



CVRF is dedicated to creating sensible, tangible, and long-term economic development opportunities that generate hope for the more than 9,100 residents of its communities. It is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of one member democratically elected from each community. CVRF is the largest Alaskan-owned seafood company in history and the first CDQ group to own and control the vessels that harvest the vast majority of its CDQ allocations.

For more info, visit www.coastalvillages.org and www.facebook.com/CoastalVillagesRegionFund.

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