

Sagafjord marks tourism horizon

By NANCY CAIN SCHMITT

When the Sagafjord pulled into the harbor of Anchorage on May 23 it marked what tourism officials hope will be a new economic horizon for Southcentral Alaska.

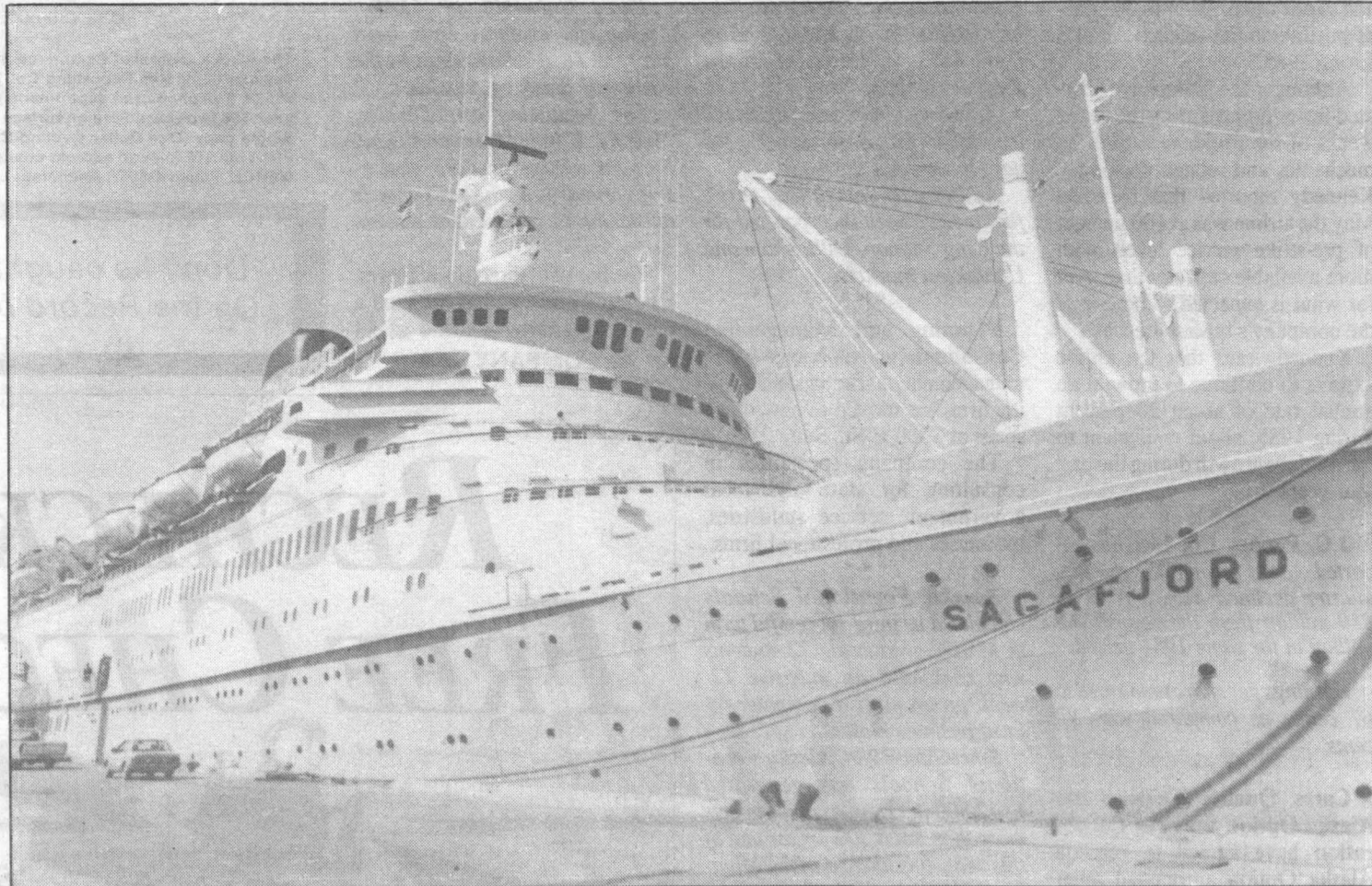
The Sagafjord was the first cruise ship to visit Anchorage since the turn of the century, and it was greeted by the well wishes of the town's top politicians and leaders—and by a beautiful, blue Alaskan sky.

The 619-foot luxury liner will be making six trips this season between Vancouver, B. C., and Anchorage with stops in Southeast and Homer along the way. It will leave Anchorage on the final cruise of the season on Sept. 5, arriving in Vancouver on Sept. 15. The inaugural cruise left Vancouver on May 12.

Of the ship's 500 passengers, about 140 were taken to the airport for return flights to the Lower 48, said Tom Rader, president of Tour Alaska, the company arranging the tours. He estimated that 100 did a turnaround, returning on the Sagafjord, taking advantage of a special inaugural sailing offer. "The first southbound sailing is always hard to fill," Rader said. However, some of the Sagafjord passengers said that many of those on the ship held United Airlines tickets and decided to return on the ship rather than be stranded at the airport in Anchorage while United pilots continued their strike and planes sat on the ground.

Some of the passengers for the return trip flew into Anchorage to get on the ship.

The rest of the passengers, Rader said, about 250 to 260, spent the



The docking of the cruiseship Sagafjord at the Port of Anchorage May 23 is seen by many in the Alaska tourism industry as a new

economic horizon for Southcentral Alaska. The Sagafjord is the first cruise ship to visit the city since the 1900s. AJC PHOTO BY NANCY CAIN SCHMITT

night either in Anchorage or Fairbanks. Tours to Denali National Park, Fairbanks, Homer, Nome and Kotzebue as well as tours of Anchorage were offered. The average stay in Alaska, he added, will be about four to five days.

Since everyone did get off the ship, Rader guessed that most of them when shopping and left money in Anchorage.

Those that did spend the night in Alaska can be counted as visitors, said Reyn Bowman, head of the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau. "By definition you're not a visitor unless you stay overnight," Bowman said. Although the state counts a person who just sails on the water as a visitor, Anchorage uses the international definition—if you don't spend the night then you're counted as an excursioner. For economic reasons, Bowman said, they're not counted because it makes for inflation of the tourism economic base. "People spend a lot of money to spend the night on the ship," he said, "but that's spent in New York, not Anchorage."

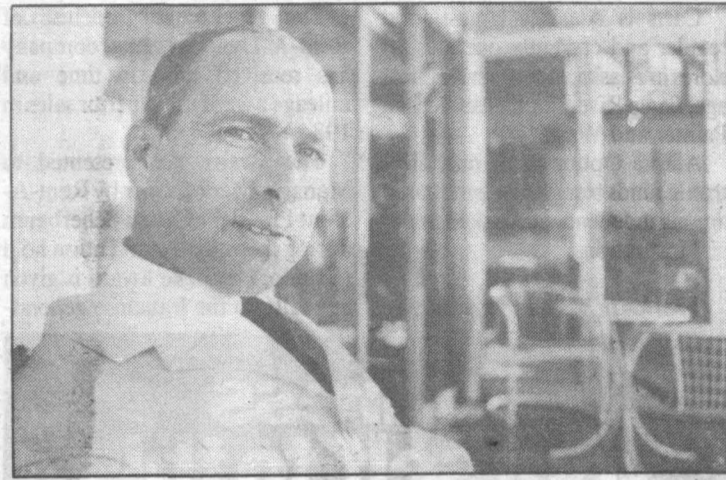
Bowman sees the arrival of the Sagafjord not as making a tremendous economic impact today, but as a sign of what could happen in the future. "It signifies a true change in itineraries so in the future we can get more cruise ships," he said. It has marked the opening up of Southcentral Alaska to the cruise industry.

He also sees it as another step in the long battle to get the Jones Act changed. Because that act requires that foreign-held vessels can't base out of domestic ports, all cruise ships in Alaska are foreign-held except for the small ships, Bowman explained.

If the Jones Act were changed, Bowman said, "we would have the true economic impact if we could get the ships based here."

"Instead of basing in Vancouver

See CRUISE, Page 20



Sagafjord Captain Terje Sorensen

Page 20



ALASKA JOURNAL OF COMMERCE & PACIFIC RIM REPORTER Week of June 3, 1985

● Cruiseship visits Anchorage

Continued from Page 1

to come for a couple of days to Southcentral, we could base them here (in Anchorage) and pick up people here and make the circle tour throughout Southeast and back to Anchorage.

"The whole industry of cruising could change."

Bowman, however, is not unhappy with the progression, however slow. "It took us five years to get into Prince William Sound, and now we're into Cook Inlet," he noted.

The arrival of the Sagafjord "symbolizes another step to that goal," Bowman said of the battle to get the Jones Act changed.

Presently the Alaska congressional delegation is working on the problem—either repeal or special arrangements for Alaska.

"We might get an exemption," he said, "because we're one of the few parts of the United States to have a cruise ship businesses." The movement has gone through the public hearing stages, but Bowman

is prepared to wait the long period of time that it often takes to move the wheels of government.

"This change would be a big economic benefit to the small Prince William communities where the only visitors they might have would be the cruise ship visitors," Bowman said.

Rader said that the overall cruise ship market in Alaska grew 43 percent this year, however he said that the growth should level off at 20 percent.

The Sagafjord's arrival in Anchorage coincided with the observation of National and Anchorage Tourism Week.

The Sagafjord, a part of the Cunard fleet, is 20 years old and is one of only two five-star cruiseliners in the world. In the Fieldings Guide to Cruising, it's listed as the best in the world.

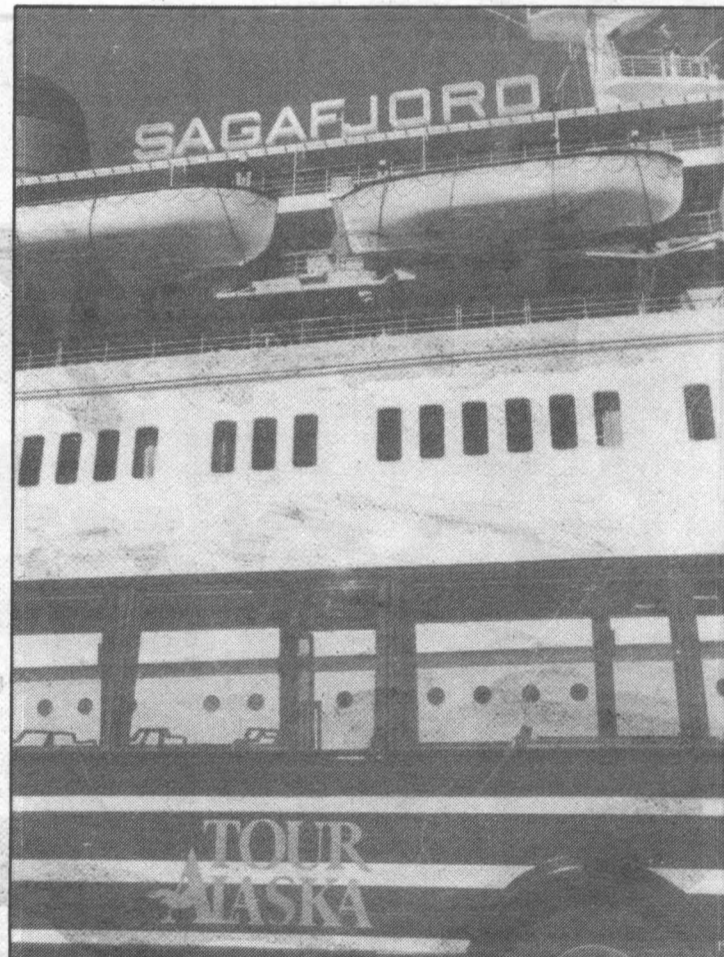
Captain Terje Sorensen, who took over for ailing Captain Magmar Berntzen who was flown to an Anchorage hospital after suffering severe nose bleed in Valdez, was content to spend his first day in

Anchorage on the ship. The Sagafjord has arrived at 12:15 a.m. and was scheduled to leave before midnight of the same day. Smiling, he said that he planned to visit the town the next trip.

A Norwegian, Sorensen has worked for Cunard since 1963. He began his maritime career 23 years ago as a deckhand in the merchant marines. In 1967 he joined the crew of the Sagafjord and has split his career between her and her sister ship, the Vistafjord, ever since. The latter visits his hometown of Oslo, Norway. After the season in Alaska, Sorensen will travel with the Sagafjord in the Caribbean, down to Rio de Janeiro and Venezuela. Later, the ship will take an around-the-world cruise.

For the past five seasons the Sagafjord has offered roundtrip cruises between Vancouver and Valdez. It wasn't the lure of Anchorage that brought the Sagafjord further northward, Sorensen said, but rather a change in marketing strategies by Cunard Lines. A decision was made to break the north trip into two segments—northbound and southbound. And to do that, it needed to end up in a major port with a major, international airport. Anchorage fitted the bill.

According to Rader, the one-



Tour Alaska handled the bookings for the recent arrival of the cruiseship Sagafjord. AJC PHOTO BY NANCY CAIN SCHMITT

way cruise could cost as little as \$1,950 (per person, double occupancy) to \$9,220 (for a two-room suite with a private veranda). The price includes all meals and entertainment activities plus return airfare. Because the trip southward

See CRUISE, Page 21

● Cruiseship

Continued from Page 20

takes an extra day (11 instead of 10), the price increases \$210. "This cruise tends to sell out from the top down," Rader said, meaning that the higher-priced tickets are the first to go. "That's very unusual," he added.

According to Sorensen, the ship has a capacity of 550 with 320 cabins. There are three pools—two for passengers and one for the crew—and six lounges. For the trip to Alaska, the outdoor pool was not in operation.

There is one big dining room which allows for one seating for meals, he said.

The ratio of crew to passengers is very high which affords better service, he added. The ship has 329 crew members and employees. "This ship is older," he said, "and because of the layout and age we have more space than other ships."

Sorensen said the ship had no trouble maneuvering through the Gulf of Alaska, a body of water that has given more than one captain a headache. And, he said, get-

ting into port was no problem. In fact, at the welcoming ceremonies, he told Port Director Tyler Jones just how easy it was. Normally where the ship docks, he said, there's not as much current as in Anchorage. The helpfulness of the port's crew made his job easier, Sorensen told Jones.

If there were one problem that the Sagafjord faced it was one of luggage.

"The idea is good," Sorensen said of coming into Anchorage. "The only problem is to streamlining the organization." He cited such practical problems as luggage handling and the logistics of getting the luggage off the ship and to the airport.

"In other ports we have big terminals with waiting areas and a way to line up the luggage." In Anchorage the luggage had to be containerized to be removed from the ship.

Sorensen feels that Anchorage needs to build a passenger terminal in order to make the operation of transferring passengers an easier and more organized task.