Hop, kick and a jump

Native Youth Olympics draws competitors from near and far

With his hands wrapped around the stick and knees bent at a 45-degree angle, Ben Boersma sat across from the opponent and stared into his eyes.

"Ready. Set. Pull!" the official proclaimed.

The competitors began pulling the stick in their own directions, grimacing as the soles of their shoes pressed together. After a few seconds, Boersma's opponent leaned to the side and let go of the stick. The duo stood up and shook hands.

The Eskimo stick pull, Boersma's favorite event, occurred during the three-day Native Youth Olympics hosted by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe's Yaghanen Youth Program in January at Kenai Middle School. The invitational, which attracted athletes from as far as Chickaloon, was part of the Peninsula Winter Games organized by the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce.

The invitational is open to youth up to the age of 18 and emphasizes sportsmanship through a range of traditional events, including the two-foot high kick, arm pull, scissor broad jump, wrist carry, seal hop, and more.

Discussion at quarterly meeting focuses on trauma, substance use

In the aftermath of a tornado that ripped through his Oklahoma home, destroying all but the closet in which he and his family hid, Darryl Tonemah began to wonder.

"I was curious how it was going to affect my family," said Tonemah, a psychologist and musician.

In December, Tonemah attended the tribe's quarterly membership meeting at the Dena'ina Wellness Center to discuss trauma and the affect it has on a person's life. The tribe invited him to speak as part of an ongoing effort to address the growing concern of substance use in the community.

Tonemah is of Kiowa, Comanche and Tuscarora heritage and currently directs the Health Promotion Program at the University of Oklahoma's College of Continuing Education, working with indigenous groups across North America.

His presentation to tribal members included everything from scientific data to history to humor, but...
**Note from the Executive Director**

Yaghali du? How is it with you? With us, it is as yaghal. It is good. More specifically, it is well. We are focusing on our community's wellness more with each passing day, and you will see that reflected in these pages. The Kenaitze Indian Tribe defines wellness far more broadly than having a good checkup at the doctor, or not having to miss work or school because you haven’t been sick. For us, wellness affects the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. This total wellness is what we are working toward in our Mission: To assure K’ahn-n’ina Dena’ina thrive forever. It is also what we are working to achieve in every program and service that the tribe offers.

For several years, this vision of total wellness—our Dene’ Model of Care—has been our guide as we’ve integrated dental, medical, behavioral health, and wellness programs into one Dena’ina Wellness Center. It has also guided us in expanding services to include physical therapy, traditional healing, orthodox dentistry and nutrition. We’ve expanded Tribal Court and social services, including education and training. The Dene’ Model of Care has also inspired us to integrate and cross-train our social service employees so that they can help with the many factors that affect our social wellness. These include a good education, job training, safe housing, and family support.

Now, as you can read on Page 1, those services are located right next to our Dena’ina Wellness Center. Across the parking lot from these two buildings, our Tribal Court is receiving national attention for its contribution to the judicial wellness of our people.

Some of you are reading this newsletter for the first time. In the past, it was distributed primarily to our 1,634 Kenaitze tribal members. Starting with this issue, we will be distributing the Counting Cord to all of our customers. We are also expanding coverage of our services at the Dena’ina Wellness Center in a special section of the newsletter called Yaghali Yuxtan: He or she got well. In this issue, the section begins on Page 12.

Stories in Yaghali Yuxtan will help introduce you to services we offer that you may not know we offer. The section will also provide tips on how to better utilize those services on your own journey to wellness.

I’d like to close with a special chiqinik—thank you— to Bill Overstreet. Bill shared with us his story about how the tribe has helped him on his journey to wellness. I hope you read his story on Page 12 and hope that his experience with our diabetes prevention program will inspire you on your own path.

Next time you see one of the tribe’s 300 employees, tell us how you are doing and how we can walk with you on your path to wellness! Chiqinik for letting us serve you.

— Jaylene Peterson-Nyren
Executive Director, Kenaitze Indian Tribe

**Note from the Council Chairperson**

Hello,

Thank you to everyone who showed up for our last quarterly meeting. We had really good attendance and your comments are going to help us on Council as we look toward fighting back against the alcohol and drugs that are hurting so many right now.

Too many people are dying from substance abuse and despair. We have to do what we can to end the cycle. With your help we can stop it. Your Council is hard-working and this is one of the biggest problems we have to solve.

We don’t have the date set for the next quarterly meeting, but tribal members will receive a post card with more information as soon as the date is set.

The Council is working on improvements to the fishery and on the tribe’s education system. Members will hear more about the facility before the opening of the net on May 1.

It is good that we have been able to move our social services next to the Dena’ina Wellness Center. The Council has already heard how the move has made it easier for people to get help.

It was the long and we will be moved into our new Elders building too. It will be good to have our own place for Elders again.

Thank you for being active in your tribe. Together we can get a lot done. We have a lot to do.

— Rosalie A. Tepp
Tribal Chairperson, Kenaitze Indian Tribe

**From the editor’s desk**

The Counting Cord is a publication for members of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and its constituents.

Find more information on the tribe’s website at kenaitze.org and like us on Facebook at facebook.com/kenaitze.

For story suggestions or questions about content, contact editor M. Scott Moon at 907-335-7237 or by email at smoon@kenaitze.org.

**VITA Program offers tax-preparation assistance**

The tribe is currently accepting appointments for those interested in utilizing the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. The program offers free tax-preparation service to Alaska Native and American Indian people who qualify for tribal services and earn an annual income of less than $54,000. The service is being offered by IRS-certified volunteers at the tribe’s administrative offices at 150 N. Willow St. Appointments are required and will be available through April 15. To schedule an appointment, contact DeeDee Fowler at 335-7622 or Sara Dennis at 335-7625.

Please bring the following documents to your appointment:

- Proof of Indian blood
- Forms W-2, 1099 and 1088
- Social Security Card or 1098 letters for you and anyone else on your tax return
- Picture Identification (such as a valid driver’s license or other government-issued ID) of you and your spouse, if applicable
- Copy of your 2014 tax return
- Any other tax forms you received for 2015

**Moving soon? Please keep in touch**

Please keep your contact information current so you don’t miss important mailings from the tribe.

Send updates to:

Kenaitze Indian Tribe
Attn: Sashia Jackson
PO. Box 985
Kenai, AK 99611
sjackson@kenaitze.org
907-335-7202

**Social Services**

- Education and Employment – scholarships; higher education assistance; job training and placement.
- Family Services – adult protection; child protection; foster care; and family preservation.
- Education and Employment – scholarships; higher education assistance; Workforce Investment Act services; youth internships; and job training and placement.

**Tribal Council**

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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
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**Stories in**

- Chiqinik can walk with you on your path to wellness!
- Under one roof
  - The following services are available at the tribe’s new office building in Old Town Kenai:
    - Social Services – energy assistance; general assistance; burial; emergency assistance, including fire, flood and earthquake; domestic violence and sexual assault; food bank; and child care.
    - Family Services – adult protection; child protection; foster care; and family preservation.
    - Education and Employment – scholarships; higher education assistance; Workforce Investment Act services; youth internships; and job training and placement.

**Contact Information**

**Kenaitze Indian Tribe**

Address: 510 Upland St. in Kenai (across from the Dena’ina Wellness Center)
Hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays

Phone: 907-335-7600

Email: smoon@kenaitze.org

**Alerts**

- Emergency assistance, including fire, flood and earthquake; domestic violence and sexual assault; food bank; and child care.
- Foster care and family preservation.
- Education and Employment – scholarships; higher education assistance; Workforce Investment Act services; youth internships; and job training and placement.

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**Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)**

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TRIUMA, from p. 1

the overwhelming message was that there is a strong correlation between trauma and health and social issues, including substance use.

To illustrate the point, Tonemah shared the findings of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE study). The study asked participants to identify different types of trauma they had experienced, including forms of neglect and abuse, divorce, substance use in the household, domestic violence, and more. For each type of trauma a participant had endured, they were assigned one point.

Citing the study, Tonemah said participants whose score was four points or higher were at 12-times greater risk for alcoholism, drug abuse, depression and suicide attempt.

“We know that trauma creates illness,” Tonemah said. “Trauma creates un-wellness.”

Recognizing that trauma can lead to harmful behaviors such as substance use is an important step toward addressing the issue, Tonemah said, though it’s a complex process.

“We need to hold up their hands. We need to love them no matter where they’re at, and we need to have compassion.” – Rita Smagge, on substance use issues.

In their own words

Trailer members stepped to the microphone during the quarterly meeting, sharing their perspectives on substance use and how it’s affected their lives as well as the community. This is a sampling of the comments offered.

“I pray for you guys. I pray for my community. I pray for my people, I want them to be whole and healthy.” – Linda Ross, on spirituality.

“‘We can’t fix the problem, you can fix the individual. But you can’t fix the individual if you keep returning them to the same environment. It doesn’t work. It’s kind of like a restraining order against yourself. You can’t go back there. No matter what.’ – George Wright, on providing after-care to those who received treatment for substance use.

“We need to hold up their hands. We need to love them no matter where they’re at, and we need to have compassion.” – Rita Smagge, on substance use issues.

“‘We will always be part of Honoring Nations,’ Peters said. ‘It’s been great to network and have other tribes reach out to us.’”

“The CASA program trains and appoints adult volunteers to represent children who have been removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect. The volunteers advocate for the child at court proceedings and work to ensure they are placed in safe homes.

Honing Nations is administered by Harvard University and identifies, celebrates and shares exemplary programs in tribal governance. It adjudges programs on a range of criteria, including effectiveness, significance to sovereignty, cultural relevance, transferability, and sustainability.

Honing Nations started in 1998 and has since recognized 124 tribal government programs from more than 80 tribal nations.

“The Honoring Nations awardees are exemplary models of success and by their best practices, all governments – tribal and non-tribal alike – can benefit,” said Megan Minoka Hill, Honoring Nations Program Director.

Tribe earns coveted award

Tribal Court, CASA receive Honoring Nations recognition

Harvard University – yes, that Harvard – has taken notice of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe.

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development recently named the tribe a winner of the 2013 Honoring Nations Award. One of six awardees nationwide, the tribe was recognized for its Tribal Court and Court Appointed Special Advocates Program – CASA.

In October, CASA program coordinator Thia Peters, Chief Judge Kim Sweet and former CASA program coordinator Joy Petrie attended the National Congress of American Indians’ 72nd Annual Convention in San Diego, where they accepted the award on behalf of the tribe.

“It was a really great experience,” Peters said. “It was amazing to watch Joy and Kim up there on stage. To be able to be part of that was amazing.”

To be eligible for an Honoring Nations award, tribal governance programs must be nominated and complete an application process.

The 2015 award pool included 87 applicants before the field was ultimately narrowed to six.

The tribe learned that it had advanced to the final stage last summer. In August, Honoring Nations representatives made a site visit, touring tribal facilities and meeting Tribal Court employees. After the site visit, Honoring Nations invited the tribe to San Diego.

That’s where Peters, Sweet and Petrie accepted an “Honors” award on behalf of the tribe. Of the six finalists, three received “Honors” and three received “High Honors.”

Peters, who became the tribe’s CASA program coordinator in August, said the award is important to the tribe and that it has already helped Tribal Court form new partnerships.

“We will always be part of Honoring Nations,” Peters said. “It’s been great to network and have other tribes reach out to us.”

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“The Honoring Nations awardees are exemplary models of success and by their best practices, all governments – tribal and non-tribal alike – can benefit,” said Megan Minoka Hill, Honoring Nations Program Director.

New Elders building set for spring opening

The new Tyotkas Elder Center in Old Town Kenai will open this spring.

Construction on the 6,500-square-foot building, which faces south toward Cook Inlet and the mouth of the Kenai River, is complete. Now crews are preparing the building for daily operation, which will include installing furniture and fixtures and relocating staff, among other projects.

Stan Mishin, President of Kulti- naht’ana Development Corp., which has been managing the project, said there have been a few delays along the way and it’s been a learning experience for those involved, but that the finished product turned out well.

“The building will have some neat features, the inside looks impressive to me,” Mishin said. “Hopefully people are excited about the building.”

The interior features a fireplace, kitchen, office space and more. But the focal point is a large gathering space framed by floor-to-ceiling windows that reveal sweeping views of the inlet and river. The exterior combines light and dark browns, including a covered entrance supported by wood pillars.

The facility sits at the same location as the old Tyotkas building on Main Avenue across from the Dena’ina Wellness Center. The old building was demolished last year.

Finishing work is underway inside the new Tyotkas Elder Center, where crews will soon install furniture and other interior equipment.

Solodota-based G&S Construction built the new facility. Kenaitze-owned Kulti- naht’ana Development Corp. is managing the project.

Junior girls

Junior boys

Junior girls

Junior boys

Senior boys

Senior girls

Senior girls
1. Shanae Harrison, Chickaloon, 15 feet, 5 inches; 2. Jenna Yeoman, Kenaitze, 15 feet, 1 inch; 3. Genevieve Wilson, Kenaitze, 14 feet, 8 inches; 4. Savanna Wilson, Kenai Peninsula, 13 feet, 8 inches; 5. Trillium Kell, Chickaloon, 13 feet, 5 inches.

Senior boys
1. Shanae Harrison, Chickaloon, 15 feet, 9 inches; 2. Tommy Cronin, Seward, 15 feet, 1 inch; 3. Luke Riley, Ninilchik, 14 feet, 8 inches; 4. Raymond McRae, Kenaitze, 14 feet, 1 inch; 5. Raymond Davis, Chickaloon, 13 feet, 10 inches.

Junior girls
1. Keenan Healy, Ninilchik, 18 feet, 6 inches; 2. Samantha Derr, Wasilla, 18 feet, 3 inches; 3. Tiffany Tsuchida, Wasilla, 18 feet, 1 inch; 4. Kassidy Oder, Kenaitze, 17 feet, 10 inches; 5. Trillium Kell, Chickaloon, 17 feet, 7 inches.

Senior girls

Senior boys

Junior girls

Senior girls
1. Shanae Harrison, Chickaloon, 15 feet, 5 inches; 2. Jenna Yeoman, Kenaitze, 15 feet, 1 inch; 3. Kassidy Oder, Kenaitze, 14 feet, 8 inches; 4. Emma Maier, Wasilla; 5. Tommy Cronin, Seward, 13 feet, 10 inches.

Senior boys

Senior girls
Participants in last fall’s Yaghanen Youth Programs Moose Camp gather at Spirit Lake to talk about the weekend’s plans.

**Lasting memories**

There was no cellphone service, it was below freezing and the boys were covered in snow.

The hunt had yet to yield an animal. And each time the fire flared up, the fire flickered out.

No, the conditions were not perfect on this Saturday afternoon in November out the Swanson River Road, miles from town.

But that did not matter to the fathers and sons. They had not come for perfect conditions. They had come, together, for the experience – the memories.

“He’s going to school, doing his thing, so it’s nice to spend time together. That’s the important thing,” said Greg Lemm, whose son, Braden, stood nearby. “And what better outfit to do it with, you know? That’s how I look at it. We’ve all out here learning – learning about the culture – and enjoying it.”

Each fall, the Yaghanen Youth Program hosts Moose Camp – “Dnigi” – taking male students on an educational hunt emphasizing the traditional and cultural way of life established by early Dena’ina people. Campers learn to harvest moose and utilize all parts of the animal, receiving instruction on gun safety and responsible outdoor practices.

A unique aspect of camp is that parents are invited to participate, supporting the tribe’s core value of family: honoring and sustaining health and happiness of family as a first responsibility. Five fathers attended in 2015 along with campers ranging from about 10 to 18 years old.

Typically, the entire camp is held at Spirit Lake in Kenai. Campers sleep in cabins, share laughs and stories around the fire, enjoy food, and participate in educational games and activities – all in a safe, substance-free environment. The group then hunts in the Spirit Lake area.

The 2015 camp began at Spirit Lake, but the hunting portion was postponed after one night when campers woke up to heavy rain in the morning. Instead of hunt, the group enjoyed an oatmeal breakfast and listened to two presentations—one on gun safety and another on the importance of moose to the Dena’ina people. Campers received hands-on demonstrations and had a chance to ask questions.

“I enjoyed learning and keeping our traditions going,” said camper Joshua Grosvold. “I also loved hanging out with friends and meeting new people.”

But camp would not end there.

About a month later, campers reconvened on a Saturday morning at the Yaghanen office. A dumping of snow had made the road impassable to Spirit Lake, so the crew chose to hunt along Swanson River Road outside Sterling.

Temperatures dipped slightly below freezing that day, but it was clear. The first stretch of road was plowed, but soon the snow deepened, slowing the caravan of vehicles carrying staff, campers and parents.

Save for a couple sets of prints along the edge of the road, there was no sign of moose before lunch, which included hot dogs around the fire.

The hunting remained slow into the afternoon and didn’t lead to a moose.

But it didn’t discourage the group.

For the Lemms, the trip provided a chance to get outside and participate in a shared passion.

“We just love being out in the woods and doing this,” Lemm said of he and Braden. “It’s a plus if you get a moose, but if not, it’s still a great day.”

For one camper, Randall Borkowski, Moose Camp was his first experience with Yaghanen.

Borkowski, 18, hailed from Mountain Village, Alaska, and moved to the central Kenai Peninsula in 2007. Growing up, he hunted everything from ptarmigan to rabbit to muskrat to duck to moose.

A recent high school graduate and the oldest camper in the bunch, Borkowski said he wanted to be a good role model during camp and that he would participate again if he has the chance and time allows.

“It’s been really fun,” Borkowski said. “I got to meet some new people and I’m finding interesting ways to have fun.”

The group made a third and final attempt in December.

On a mild but overcast Saturday, the area of choice was again Swanson River Road.

The group drove past an array of lakes and trailheads, scanning clearings and peering between clusters of trees. Much of the snow had melted since their previous attempt, but signs of moose remained scant.

After another campfire and hot dogs for lunch, the hunt continued into the afternoon to no avail.

Back at a pullout near the beginning of the road, the group agreed it was time to go home.

“Even though we didn’t harvest a moose, I believe that we still met many of our goals by providing cultural education and fellowship for young men and their fathers,” said Michael Bernard, Yaghanen Manager.

Bernard has worked at the tribe for more than a decade and coordinated and led dozens of camps.

This year’s camp was special for Bernard because his son, Cooper, attended.

“I really enjoy being able to teach my children the knowledge and skills that I’ve been able to share with so many other children throughout the years,” Bernard said.

Joshua Grosvold’s father, Sam, also attended camp and said he cherished the time with his son.

The Grosvolds became involved with Yaghanen in the mid-2000s when the program needed a drummer for the Peninsula Winter Games. Since then, the duo has enjoyed music, fishing and more through the program.

The elder Grosvold said he and his son won’t soon forget those experiences—especially Moose Camp.

“It’s priceless. How can you say it’s anything but good?” Sam Grosvold said. “It’s just memories. We’ll remember this forever.”

Camps learn about gun safety from the tribe’s Safety and Security Administrator Kaleb Franke.

Moose camp offers more than a lesson plan

Participants in last fall’s Moose Camp gather around the fire.
**From Alaska to the Capitol**

Tribe participates in Capitol Christmas Tree festivities

When the lights adorning the 2015 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree came on during a lighting ceremony at the Capitol in December, a 74-foot Lutz spruce stood in the glow — not far from members of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe.

For the tree, taken from Alaska's Chugach National Forest, it was the end of a cross-country journey over land and sea.

For the tribe, it was the culmination of involvement around the first Capitol Christmas Tree to come from Alaska.

In September, tribal youth and Elders worked together to create culturally significant ornaments to decorate the tree. In October, Kenaitze representatives attended the ceremony when the tree was felled, offering a traditional blessing during the event. Then, in December, tribal leadership visited Washington DC to celebrate the lighting of the tree.

"I hope everyone realizes how much it means to us," tribal Elder Ross said. "It's a special thing for Alaska, to be able to highlight the beauty of our land and this tree for the rest of the world." Ross said it was important to honor the tree before it was cut. "Just to recognize the sacrifice of the tree, which is a living being with a spirit," he said. "We're taking its life, so it's important to show respect."

The Alaska Sealife Center hosted a community celebration following the tree-cutting ceremony. The Yaghanen Youth Program's Juk'ina Dancers and Del Dumi Drummers opened the celebration with performances near the center's main entrance, greeting visitors with traditional song and dance. Tribal employees also were onsite cooking fry bread.

**Bridging generations**

Early Childhood Center, Tyotkas bring together youth and Elders over lunch

The Early Childhood and Tyotkas Elder Center are using food to help connect the widest members of the tribe with some of the youngest.

For the past few months, Early Childhood Center students have been visiting Tyotkas to eat lunch with Elders, sharing tables, food and conversation.

"It's important to us to bridge that gap between the younger kids and the Elders," said Diane Bernard, education and disability coordinator at the Early Childhood Center.

Bernard said the programs had a similar arrangement in the past, but it wasn't until last summer when the idea was reborn and planning began.

Now the partnership is established and visits have been occurring once every week. "It's important to us, and it's important to the Elders," Bernard said. "It's a special thing for Alaska, to be able to highlight the beauty of our land and this tree for the rest of the world." Ross said going to the beach with Elders.

As Hodena are baked ham, corn on the cob and macaroni and cheese, Diego played with small toys across the table between bites of food.

"Everything is wonderful," Hodena said, smiling at her younger counterpart. "It's important to us to bridge that gap between the younger kids and the Elders," she said. "We're taking its life, so it's important to show respect."

"It's important to us, and it's important to the Elders," Bernard said. "It's a special thing for Alaska, to be able to highlight the beauty of our land and this tree for the rest of the world." Ross said.

**Children make ‘Survival Soup’**

**Partnerships key to curriculum**

The Early Childhood Center has been partnering with programs across the tribe on a number of activities and events. Kaleb Franke, the tribe’s Safety and Security Administrator, recently presented information about preparing for emergencies. Parents and children who attended made “Survival Soup,” including kits that were donated to the Na’init Food Bank. Employees from the Dena’ina Wellness Center have been teaching children, families and staff about healthy lunch ideas, eating on a budget and nutrition. Additionally, Erica Long, Family Wellness Consultant at DWC, has been hosting Wednesday morning socials for families wishing to have open dialogue under professional guidance. The center also recently hosted its annual Winter Dinner, celebrating a successful 2015.

**Child Center accepting applications**

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe’s Early Childhood Center is currently accepting applications for the 2015-2016 school year. The center serves families from many different backgrounds, Native and non-Native, low income or not, as well as children with disabilities.

Children must be 3 or 4 years old by Sept. 1, 2015, to be eligible. The no-fee program operates Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more information or to schedule a tour, please call the center’s main line at 907-335-7260 or ask the Children’s Wellness Administrator at 907-335-7259. A waitlist is being maintained. The center is currently accepting applications for the 2015-2016 school year. The center serves families from many different backgrounds, Native and non-Native, low income or not, as well as children with disabilities. Children must be 3 or 4 years old by Sept. 1, 2015, to be eligible. The no-fee program operates Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more information or to schedule a tour, please call the center’s main line at 907-335-7260 or ask the Children’s Wellness Administrator at 907-335-7259. A waitlist is being maintained. The center is currently accepting applications for the 2015-2016 school year. The center serves families from many different backgrounds, Native and non-Native, low income or not, as well as children with disabilities. Children must be 3 or 4 years old by Sept. 1, 2015, to be eligible. The no-fee program operates Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more information or to schedule a tour, please call the center’s main line at 907-335-7260 or ask the Children’s Wellness Administrator at 907-335-7259. A waitlist is being maintained. The center is currently accepting applications for the 2015-2016 school year. The center serves families from many different backgrounds, Native and non-Native, low income or not, as well as children with disabilities. Children must be 3 or 4 years old by Sept. 1, 2015, to be eligible. The no-fee program operates Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more information or to schedule a tour, please call the center’s main line at 907-335-7260 or ask the Children’s Wellness Administrator at 907-335-7259. A waitlist is being maintained. The center is currently accepting applications for the 2015-2016 school year. The center serves families from many different backgrounds, Native and non-Native, low income or not, as well as children with disabilities. Children must be 3 or 4 years old by Sept. 1, 2015, to be eligible. The no-fee program operates Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. For more information or to schedule a tour, please call the center’s main line at 907-335-7260 or ask the Children’s Wellness Administrator at 907-335-7259. A waitlist is being maintained.
Taking the preventive path

Diabetes Prevention Program takes proactive approach, encouraging healthy diet, exercise

Bill Overstreet walked into the grocery store, stroked to the salad bar and grabbed a plastic-to-go box. Tongs in hand, he scanned the colorful spread — carrots, lettuce, peppers — and began assembling his lunch.

Then, nearby, something caught his eye: a neatly packaged pecan pie.

“It was pretty tempting,” Overstreet said. “But I passed it up.”

As he told the story before a morning workout at the Dena’ina Wellness Center in December, Overstreet admitted there was a time, not long ago, when he would have made a different choice had he faced the same temptation.

Overstreet, 54, is enrolled in the Diabetes Prevention Program offered through the Wellness Department. The program is open to customers who have been diagnosed with pre-diabetes, encouraging exercise, a balanced diet and other healthy lifestyle choices.

Before he entered the program, Overstreet paid little attention to his health. “I was more interested in my job as well,” he said. “For example, one of his professions, he was a truck driver, and he would drive commercial vehicles to meet specific medical requirements.”

Overstreet uses his phone to display a photo of one of the healthy meals he now cooks regularly. “I’m not starving myself by any means,” he said. “I’m just watching what I eat.”

Teaching healthy lifestyle habits is one of the most important components of the program. Robin Morris, Diabetes Prevention Coordinator and Wellness Consultant, said participants meet once a week for classes and receive coaching and individualized plans. Participants also have access to seasonal harvesting activities, healthy cooking demonstrations and more. The program spans 16 weeks.

“Participants learn a lot about the importance of planning meals and goal-setting and achieving their goals — not only for health reasons, but for disease prevention and diabetes prevention,” Morris said.

But the challenge does not end when participants graduate. Morris said graduates are put on a list and contacted to participate in future wellness activities, something not lost on Overstreet, who completed the program a couple years ago only to gain the weight back.

Adding to the stakes, diabetes rates are higher than average among Alaska Native and American Indian people.

Morris said she sees many customers who approach her out of fear because of family history.

“They come to us and say, ‘I don’t want to have to do that, how can I prevent that?’” she said.

Overstreet has asked the same question. And although it’s been a challenge, and the hardest work is yet to come, now he has an answer: “It’s more self-discipline and determination than anything. If you can’t discipline yourself, it’s not going to work,” Overstreet said.

“I should be eating a salad with salmon, but yet I’m really craving a hamburger, well, what’s going to be the outcome?”

Bill Overstreet works out on the treadmill in the Dena’ina Wellness Center’s activity area. Overstreet is enrolled in the Diabetes Prevention Program. Below, he talks about the dramatic improvements he has made to his health by eating better and by being more active.

Overstreet consumes about 1,500 calories a day and has maintained an activity schedule of roughly 200 minutes per week. He regularly uses a treadmill in the Dena’ina Wellness Center’s activity area. Overstreet manages his condition with a combination of diet and exercise, and he has stopped smoking.

The Kenai resident weighed 267 pounds and had high blood pressure and elevated glucose levels. His tonics were removed about two years ago, and he has used a breathing machine to assist with sleep apnea.

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Calling it quits

Tobacco cessation services available at the Dena’ina Wellness Center

To those who use tobacco but would like to quit, Deb Nyquist has a simple message.

“When you’re ready, we’re here,” Nyquist said.

The Dena’ina Wellness Center offers many services to people wishing to eliminate tobacco from their life. Assistance is available to customers who use any form of tobacco as well as those exposed to secondhand smoke or who simply want information about tobacco use and how to quit. Referrals are not required.

Nyquist, DWC Wellness Director, said the benefits far outweigh the challenges of quitting.

“There are a million reasons to quit,” she said.

Tobacco takes on many forms, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, bidis, hookah, chew, q’milk, snuff, snus, orbs, e-cigarettes, pens, and other developing products.

Nyquist said it takes the average person seven to 11 attempts to permanently quit, meaning there’s value in working with one of the center’s professionally trained tobacco-cessation counselors.

The Wellness Department also offers free tobacco-quit kits throughout the year. Another good resource, Nyquist added, is the Alaska Tobacco Quit Line at 1-800-784-8669.

The tobacco cessation program tailors care to meet individuals’ needs.

“We want to serve our whole family of customers,” Nyquist said.

Which stage are you in?

Pre-contemplation: “I like to smoke.”

Contemplation: “I like to smoke, but I know I need to quit.”

Preparation: “I’m ready to quit.”

Action: “I’m not smoking, but I still think about smoking from time to time.”

Maintenance: “I used to smoke.”

To access tobacco cessation services at DWC, please call 907-335-7500.

Know the risks

• Do you have a parent, brother or sister with diabetes?
• Are you Alaska Native or American Indian people?
• Do you have high weight?
• Do you have high blood pressure?
• Do you have high cholesterol?
• Are you 45 years or older?

If the answer is yes to any of these questions, act now by contacting the Dena’ina Wellness Center at 907-335-7500.

Do your part

• Eat healthy
• Move toward a healthy weight
• Manage stress
• Treat high blood pressure and cholesterol
• Get enough sleep

Have you been diagnosed with diabetes? The Diabetes Wellness Program teaches participants to live well and manage diabetes. In addition to their medical provider, customers have access to a number of specialists, including foot and eye care, a dietician, and more.
Off the wall

When tribal Elders Rita Smagge was asked what the Kenaitze Indian Tribe’s education system should be based on, she didn’t hesitate to answer: “It’s time to take our traditional values off the wall and start living them,” she said. Smagge’s reference to the traditional values posters hanging on the walls across tribal operations is the inspiration for this space, “Off the Wall.”

Off the Wall will celebrate people who bring the tribe’s traditional values into use, by shining a light on them in their daily lives.

Phone tree

As told by tribal Elder Alexandra “Sally” Lingdren: “In the early 1990s, the Anchorage Museum hosted the Ethelene Collection exhibit displaying Alaska Native artifacts collected from Kenaitze and other regional tribes in the 1800s. The Kenaitze Indian Tribe used these several tribal artifacts to give their students a historical perspective of their ancestors.

As a member of the Historical Heritage, I traveled with the tribe to look at each of the items and we then presented the show to the students. I was pleased to see that they enjoyed learning about their ancestors and the stories that were behind the artifacts.

The Historical Heritage decided to continue presenting the Ethelene Collection to the students, so in the fall of 1996, we organized a phone call—‘off the wall’—to Mrs. Smith in Kenai. Sally was all for it. She was impressed with the idea of presenting the show to the students. She encouraged the Historical Heritage to continue the program and to consider the idea of presenting the show at the tribe’s Annual Meeting.

If you would like to nominate someone for consideration in Off the Wall, please submit a nomination that includes the following:

1. Focus on your child:
   - Encourage your child to be proud of their Kenaitze heritage.
   - Help your child to understand the importance of family values.
   - Support your child in their efforts to learn about their Kenaitze heritage.
   - Introduce your child to the Kenaitze language and culture.

2. Practice: Role-playing situations can help your child understand the values that are important to your family and the tribe.
   - Role-play situations that teach your child about the importance of sharing and generosity.
   - Role-play situations that teach your child about the importance of being respectful and kind.

3. Don’t offer material rewards for good behavior:
   - Avoid giving your child material rewards for good behavior.
   - Instead, offer words of praise and encouragement.

4. Explain good oral hygiene:
   - Teach your child about good oral hygiene.
   - Encourage your child to brush and floss their teeth regularly.

5. Focus on your child:
   - Encourage your child to focus on their own dental health.
   - Encourage your child to look at their teeth in the mirror and talk about any concerns they may have.

Drum group meets at new time

Come drum, sing or listen on Wednesdays, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Dena’ina Wellness Center as the Heartbeat of Mother Earth Drum starts meeting at a new time. All adults are welcome to sit at the drum. Participants are respectfully asked to have 72 hours of sobriety prior to joining the drum circle.

Monthly foot spa open to Elders

The foot spa is first, first since Devils Chestnut encouraged Elders to participate, saying it is intended to be a relaxing event. “It’s a good time to come together with other Elders and receive some good foot treatment,” Cheezem said.

For additional information, contact Chceezem at 907-335-7514.

Children at the tribes early Childhood Center brush their teeth after lunch. Dentists from the Dena’ina Wellness Center regularly visit the center to help teach children healthy habits.
The Big Picture

Kenaitze Indian Tribe employees “rock their mocs” at the Dena’ina Wellness Center in November during the 5th annual Rock Your Mocs week, a worldwide movement to celebrate indigenous culture. Participants are encouraged to wear moccasins or mukluks. Pictured footwear includes materials from beaver, otter, wolf, moose, polar bear, lynx coyote, spotted seal and bearded seal.

Our Mission
To assure Kahtnuht’ana Dena’ina thrive forever.

Our Values
These are the beliefs and principles that define our people and will assure our future as a tribe:

Family: Honoring and sustaining health and happiness of family as a first responsibility

Stewardship: Respectful use of land, resources and all creations

Spiritual Beliefs: Acknowledging the existence of a higher power and respecting spiritual beliefs

Education: Passing down cultural knowledge and traditions and supporting formal education

Our Vision
By 2025, the Kahtnuht’ana Dena’ina have enhanced and strengthened the prosperity, health and culture of their people and tribe by:

- working toward united effort with Native organizations and other governments that impact our people.
- developing and implementing a tribal education system.
- living our traditional values and practices.
- empowering our sovereignty.
- continuing to demonstrate resiliency.
- striving for excellence in all of our programs.
- elevating the wellness of our people.
- using our talents and resources to ensure we are able to take care of ourselves and share with others.

Addresses and phone numbers

Administration Building
150 N. Willow St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7200
907-335-7239 fax

Early Childhood Center
130 N. Willow St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7260

Tyotkas Elders Center
1000 Mission Ave., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7280

Yaghanen Youth Programs
35105 K-B Dr., Soldotna, AK 99669
907-335-7290

Environmental Program
150 N. Willow St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7287

Dena’ina Wellness Center
508 Upland St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7500

Na’ini Social Services
510 Upland St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7600

Tribal Court
508 Upland St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7217

On the Web: kenaitze.org
On Facebook: facebook.com/kenaitze