Executive Council reports on recent New Zealand trip

A group of tribal members – including six members of the Executive Council – recently returned from New Zealand after participating in a two-week indigenous education exchange.

Jon Ross, a tribal member and Tsiltan Management Group consultant who attended and helped coordinate the trip, reported on the experience during a quarterly membership meeting at the Denaina Wellness Center in July. The trip occurred in partnership with the Maori people, an indigenous group that operates its own education system.

“The Council went to New Zealand to see successful Maori education programs firsthand in order to better determine what they would like to see happen in Kenai with an education system for our community that teaches traditional knowledge and develops life-long learners,” Ross said.

In his report, Ross said there were four goals of the visit: To accelerate the planning and development of an education system that would teach traditional knowledge and develop life-long learners.

Kenaitze corporation lands local fish biz

Kahtnuht’ana Development Corp., a federally chartered business corporation wholly owned by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, has acquired a local seafood and wild game processing business.

The purchase of Soldotna-based Custom Seafood Processors Inc. was made official in May, said Stan Mishin, President of Kahtnuht’ana Development Corp. The business, based out of a 12,000-square-foot building on the Kenai Spur Highway, includes a large processing area as well as retail space.

Mishin said Kahtnuht’ana Development Corp. examined six business opportunities before ultimately acquiring Custom Seafood, which opened in the mid-1990s and moved to its current location in 2006.

That the business is local, well-established and connected to the fishing industry made it an attractive option, Mishin added.

“We said, ‘Why don’t we look at a seafood business? There’s a connection to tribal culture and tribal...”
This year’s race will be the fourth Superhero 5k Run/Walk for CASA.

A super race, a super cause

Get ready to channel your inner superhero. The 4th Annual CASA Superhero 5k Run/Walk is set for 11 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 20. The race begins and ends at the Tribal Courthouse in Old Town Kenai.

"It’s a great time to have families get together and enjoy our beautiful state of Alaska," said Thia Peters, the tribe’s CASA program coordinator. "Rain or shine, everywhere, everyone gets out there and has fun.” And it’s for a good cause. The race, a family-friendly affair in which participants dress up as their favorite fictional heroes, is a fundraiser for the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program. The CASA program supports foster children going through the state and tribal court system, pairing them with trained adult volunteers who advocate on the child’s behalf during court proceedings. All proceeds from the race go directly to CASA.

"The main reason for doing the run is to get money for the kids and to help them and the families that help them in foster care," Peters said. The event continues to gain popularity since its inception in 2013, when it drew 65 participants. It drew 98 people in 2014 and eclipsed 100 in 2015, bringing in 109 racers.

"There have been a lot of interesting ones," Peters said. One change to this year’s race is the tour participants will run. In previous years, the race started and ended at the Kenai Park Strip along Main Street Loop in Kenai. This year, however, it will start and end at the Tribal Courthouse in Old Town. Racers will move through Old Town and travel along Beach Access Road before ultimately returning to the courthouse. Peters encouraged past participants and first-timers alike to attend.

"The more, the merrier," she said. "If you know someone who might be interested, please pass the word along and come on out.” Those interested in becoming a CASA volunteer or learning more about the program are encouraged to contact Peters at 907-335-7219. The Incredibles to Dr. Seuss. The 2016 version will include a post-race barbecue. There will also be a costume contest with prizes awarded in three categories – best children’s costume, best family costume and best couple’s costume. And for those wishing to capture the moment, a photo booth will be onsite.

Costumes are not required, but Peters encouraged participants to be creative and have fun. She said previous wristbands have ranged from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to the Incredibles to Dr. Seuss. "There have been a lot of interesting ones," Peters said. One change to this year’s race is the tour participants will run. In previous years, the race started and ended at the Kenai Park Strip along Main Street Loop in Kenai. This year, however, it will start and end at the Tribal Courthouse in Old Town. Racers will move through Old Town and travel along Beach Access Road before ultimately returning to the courthouse. Peters encouraged past participants and first-timers alike to attend.

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Members of the Kenaitze delegation talk with students and staff at Te Kura Kaupapa Maori o Ruamata.

Educaiton, from p1

During the meeting, tribal members had a chance to ask questions and offer comments about the trip. Questions ranged from the costs of the trip, to the feasibility of creating a Kenaitze education system, to funding in the future, and more.

Children from Te Wananga o Aotearoa perform for the Kenaitze delegation during the group’s tour of their school.

The Kenaitze delegation tours the grounds at Ngakatawhera, at far left.

At left, Linda Ross, Chairperson Rosalie A. Tepp and Jon Ross plant a tree during the New Zealand trip.

Celebrate for the ages

Tribe introduces and blesses new Tyotkas Elder Center

It’s a new era for the tribe’s Tyotkas Elder Program.

The tribe officially introduced and blessed its new Tyotkas Elder Center during a gathering in June, celebrating with food, music and good conversation. More than 100 people attended.

“This is absolutely beautiful,” said Betty Porter, a tribal Elder. “I am so happy that this building was built for the Elders.”

Construction started about a year ago, and the building has been open since March. Prior to doors opening, Elder services had been offered in the nearby Fort Kenai building.

Council members emphasized that the tribe is in the exploratory phase of creating its own education system and that no decisions have been made. But in sharing their experiences from the trip, the group unanimously agreed it was a useful, powerful experience.

“I was totally, totally amazed and blown away by all that we saw,” said Linda Ross, the tribal Elder who attended.

During the meeting, tribal members had a chance to ask questions and offer comments about the trip.

Executive Director Jaylene Peterson-Nyen said the center’s location makes it convenient for Elders to access those services. She also credited Elders for inspiring the tribe to create an Old Town campus.

“Thank you for that vision,” Peterson-Nyen said. “Here we are.”

The building’s interior features a fireplace, library, commercial-grade kitchen, and office space. But the focal point is a gathering space framed by large windows facing the water and mountains. The exterior combines light and dark browns, including a covered entrance supported by large wood pillars.

Executive Director Jaylene Peterson-Nyen carries a candle as she leads Father Thomas Andrew through the building during a Russian Orthodox blessing.

Shayna Franke, Elders Program Director, said it felt great to be in the new building and that the feedback has been positive.

She credited the Elders Committee and other Elders for their involvement in the building’s planning.

“This building really, truly came from the Elders themselves,” Franke said. “The Elders gave a lot of feedback and did fantastic selections.”

Porter, 86, who was born in Ninilchik, said the new facility is impressive and she is amazed by the tribe’s growth in recent years. She remembers when skiffs and sled dogs were primary forms of transportation to Kenai.

“I am so proud of all they’ve done,” Porter said of the tribe. “It’s wonderful.”

Father Thomas Andrew of Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church offered a building blessing. The afternoon also included performances by the Jabila’ina Dance Group and Del Dumi Drum Group. Attendees received a commemorative wood coin engraved with the phrase, “Naqantugheduł– the tide is coming in.”

The Tyotkas Elder Program once operated out of different locations amid that growth, said the Elder program served 266 meals. In 2015, on the other hand, it served 9,168 meals.

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The Utulik Drum Group performs during the Grand Opening of the Tyotkas Elder Center in Old Town Kenai.

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Emilie Price reacts to putting her hand into a glove full of Crisco shortening during a science camp lesson called “blubber gloves.” Kids at the Early Childhood Center learned how fat keeps animals warm in cold water during the lesson.

Learning with ‘blubber gloves’

Tribal programs partner in the name of science and fun

The children stepped forward, one by one, pushing their hands into latex gloves full of Crisco shortening. Then they knelt down, gloves on, plunging their palms and fingers into buckets of water.

“It feels so weird!”

“I felt really cold without one,” said Mylee Barnette, 8.

Emilie Price reacts to putting her hand into a glove full of Crisco shortening during a science camp lesson called “blubber gloves.” Kids at the Early Childhood Center learned how fat keeps animals warm in cold water during the lesson.

Participants in one of the tribe’s Susten archaeology camps work in June on journal entries after laboring on a dig in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge near Swan Lake Road.

For Ahlers, 14, Susten Camp is one of many Yaghanen activities in which she has participated. She previously attended Fish Camp and also competes on the Native Youth Olympics team. She enjoys all the activities but especially likes the Native Youth Olympics.

“It’s my favorite because it’s lots of fun and there are all these different events you can do,” Ahlers said. “It’s not like other sports where you don’t talk to the other team and everyone is competitive. You help other teams and help them get better.”

The children, all members of the tribe, are learning what they call blubber gloves. Ahlers sat with her knees tucked to her chin. Steps away, one of her fellow campers pushed a yankstick toward the bottom of a hole and called out a sequence of numbers. Inside the hole, another camper shoved clumps of dirt into a plastic bag, sealing it shut.

“It’s fun, it’s a cool experience,” Ahlers said, watching her peers as she took a break from digging. “I like seeing the different layers of the dirt, to see the history.”

In June, Ahlers attended Susten Archeology Camp hosted by the tribe’s Yaghanen Youth Program in partnership with Cook Inlet Tribal Council and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. It was one of two Susten Camps Yaghanen hosted in June. The second, based in Cooper Landing with projects at the Crescent Creek Campground, occurred in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and Applied Archeology International.

The multi-day camp, open to school-age children involved in the Yaghanen program, is designed to give participants a real-world experience in the archeology field while preserving Dena’ina culture and traditions.

“We are teaching the youth how to be stewards of the land and cultural sites,” said Michael Bernard, Yaghanen Program Director. “We also put an emphasis on living a substance free lifestyle.”

At the camp Ahlers attended, students slept in cabins at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge’s Outdoor Education Center down Swan River Road near Sterling. For two afternoons, the 18 participants split into groups and dug up soil at locations believed to be previously used by Dena’ina people.

The sites, tucked in the trees a few hundred feet off the road, featured small clusters of cache pits. Campers dug down in 10-centimeter intervals, recording distances and taking soil samples at each level.

Ahlers’ team discovered what they believed to be pieces of charcoal near the Dena’ina language.

“We want them to go back to school and think that science is fun and understand that they are really good at it,” Trefon said. “I want these guys to grow up and have a job like mine.”

Under a canopy of trees in the Alaska woods, Kya Ahlers sat with her knees tucked to her chin. Steps away, one of her fellow campers pushed a yankstick toward the bottom of a hole and called out a sequence of numbers. Inside the hole, another camper shoved clumps of dirt into a plastic bag, sealing it shut.

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Participants in one of the tribe’s Susten archaeology camps work in June on journal entries after laboring on a dig in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge near Swan Lake Road.

With Dena’ina archeology you just don’t find much. They had a very perishable technology,” Corbett said. “Skin, wood, bark – they just don’t last. And there’s not much in the way of stone tools because they would have taken them and reused them until they were trash.”

Back at the education center after the dig was complete, campers processed soil samples. They placed the dirt in water and waited for the contents to float or sink.

Light objects – such as seeds, leaves and bits of charcoal – floated to the surface. Heavy objects – such as stones or fragments of tools – sank to the bottom.

“We’re looking for things that might give us an idea of what’s happening in these pits,” Corbett said of the process.

Corbett, who has participated in Susten Camp since the mid-1990s, said it has moved locations over the years. Previous camps were held near the Russian River and in Kalifornsky Beach Village. The focus is always on Dena’ina history.

“Corbett said it’s been a joy to participate for the past 20-plus years due in large part to the campers.

“They are cheerful, hardworking and sometimes challenging, but always a pleasure to be around,” she said. “I hope the kids get half as much out of it as I do every year.”

For Ahlers, 14, Susten Camp is one of many Yaghanen activities in which she has participated. She previously attended Fish Camp and also competes on the Native Youth Olympics team. She enjoys all the activities but especially likes the Native Youth Olympics.

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A new home for the old Georgia J

Tribal member helps preserve history with restoration of commercial fishing boat that propeller, “son said of father. “We couldn’t get the net out of that weather, and cut that net out of the stern of that boat and went under in the choppy saltwater.”

June–August 2016

Six decades have passed, but Brian Johannsen still remembers the day he learned an important lesson aboard the Georgia J. He was young, 9 or 10 years old, commercial salmon fishing in Cook Inlet with his father Alexander “Ike” Johannsen. The weather had come up, a cold wind, and their net was wrapped in the propeller.

“Don’t you worry,” his father told him. “I’ll go over the side.”

The Georgia J was adrift in the inlet for about 10 years. For a time the boat was identifiable only by a number, but Ike decribed it as a “Mrs. Wilson” to him. He said he always enjoyed going home, not just to play with the kids, but because the meat soup always been “Mrs. Wilson” to him. And Zirul said that Wilson didn’t hesitate to talk sense into her when she needed it.

A truly amazing mom, grandmother, and wife,” Connie Wilson said.

Longtime family friend who grew up near the Wilson home and often visited to play with Wilson’s children, said she has always been “Mrs. Wilson” to him. A truly amazing mom, grandmother, and wife,“ Connie Wilson said. "Hakkinen, a longtime family friend who grew up near the Wilson home and often visited to play with Wilson’s children, said she has always been “Mrs. Wilson” to him. And Zirul said that Wilson didn’t hesitate to talk sense into her when she needed it. “Auntie Fiocla always took special care of me,” Zirul said.

In June, the center hosted booths at a pair of popular community events. First there was the Kenai River Festival, where staff members provided information about the center’s programs and services and handed out applications. Activities during the event included stamping fish pictures with celery, beading and an obstacle course. Then came “Fun in the Midnight Sun” as part of Nikiski Days, where the center offered beading activities as well as program information and applications.

Students visit the animal shelter.

Summer camp offers fun, healthy activities

Children participating in ECC’s Summer Camp kept busy in June and into July. Preschool-age participants visited the Kenai animal shelter, learning about animal safety. Other activities included a game called “Bucket Ball,” science-related fun, walks, and more. Older students have been wearing pedometers to track the distance they walk, the goal being to walk 50 miles before camp ends.

Applications being accepted for next year

The center is currently accepting applications for the 2016-2017 school year. The program is proud to serve families from many different backgrounds, Native and non-Native, low income and not, as well as children with disabilities. Children must be 3 or 4 years old by Sept. 1, 2016, 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 school tour, please call the school’s main line at 907-335-7260 or Sasha Fallon, Community Partnership Coordinator, at 907-335-7259.

Early Childhood Center enjoying a busy summer

The regular school year might be over, but students and staff at the Early Childhood Center are keeping busy. Here are a few recent highlights:

Two community events, two booths

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THE COUNTING CORD

June–August 2016

Bay Double-Ender that plied Alaska’s waters during the heyday of commercial fishing will be restored and preserved. June Harris, president of the Kenai Historical Society, said plans are in the works to create a plaque recognizing the Hinrichs as well as an informational sign offering a history of the boat. Both will be placed near the vessel.

“We’re excited to have this piece of history donated to the society,” Harris said.

According to the Center for Wooden Boats, the Bristol Bay Double-Ender was originally designed for rowing and sailing. The boats were popular in the Bristol Bay fishery during the first half of the 20th century because motors were not allowed until 1951. Ike Johannsen purchased the Georgia J in 1955. The boat still had a mast, hawp, wicker and set of long oars, but within a year, Ike had it motorized and ready to fish in Cook Inlet.

Back then, business was strong at the Libby, McNeill and Libby Cannery on the south bank of the Kenai River. The cannery, which changed names multiple times over the years, employed many Dena’ina people and was a hub for Cook Inlet fishermen such as the Johansens.

Brian Johannsen said that his father fished on the Georgia J for about 10 years. For a time the boat was identifiable only by a number, but Ike decided to name it after his wife, who died last winter. Ike died at the age of 74 in the 1990s.

As a crane lowered the Georgia J into place at the historical society, Brian Johannsen thanked those who contributed to the project, saying it had been a long time coming and that it felt good to finally see the plan come together. “I know dad would be proud and so would my mom,” he said.

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A healthy harvest

Woodlands workshop, and other activities, promote wellness through wild foods

The Wellness Department recently hosted a two-day “Woodlands” activity, offering a field trip and workshop on the nutritional qualities and cultural significance of wild food.

During the fieldtrip, participants spent a morning outside learning to identify different plants and flowers. With a focus on harvesting etiquette, they picked fireweed, fiddlehead ferns and horsetail shoots. Wellness staff then pickled the harvest overnight and shared samples with the group the following day.

As they sampled the fare, participants received nutritional information and consumption guidelines while learning the health benefits of each plant. They also discussed how Dena’ina people have traditionally used the plants.

Throughout summer, the department also has been offering free transportation to the Farmers Fresh Market Solidotna Food Bank. Additionally, Wellness Director Deb Nyquist said wild foods will be the theme of the Harvest Moon Local Food Festival in August. The annual event will include workshops and activities hosted at the Dena’ina Wellness Center.

To get involved in wellness activities, contact the center at 907-335-7500.

Travel reimbursement available to some un’ina

Customers – un’ina – who are referred from the Dena’ina Wellness Center to the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage may be reimbursed for travel incurred in a personal vehicle.

To receive a reimbursement, un’ina must complete an authorization form and have it signed by providers at both facilities. The form then must be submitted to the Dena’ina Wellness Center within 30 days of the appointment. Un’ina can only receive one reimbursement per round trip, regardless of the number of appointments attended during the trip.

Medicaid recipients are not eligible for travel reimbursement. Travel to dental, optical, physical therapy and behavioral health appointments cannot be reimbursed, either.

Reimbursement requests are processed quarterly and may take up to six months to be paid. For additional information, please contact the center at 907-335-7500.

Wellness Center appointments: helpful tips and information

Medical professionals at the Dena’ina Wellness Center recommend calling ahead to schedule an appointment. That’s the best approach to take if you are a Dena’ina Wellness Center customer – un’ina – wishing to see a doctor for routine, non-urgent issues.

“We always want un’ina, ideally, to see their primary care provider,” said Jen Jarvis, interim primary care health services administrator. “They need to call in to make that appointment. That helps our teams better prepare for them.”

If the un’ina’s primary care provider is not available that day, a same-day appointment with the walk-in provider may be available. Call in starting at 7:30 a.m. to secure an appointment to cover issues such as burns, infections, sprains and strains, and other more pressing, out-of-the-ordinary issues. Though a person can always walk in for an appointment, staff recommends calling first. Un’ina who receive a walk-in slot must remain present until their appointment time.

Jarvis emphasized it’s best to call ahead and get on the schedule. “Your primary care provider is going to be able to take the best care of you,” Jarvis said. “They know you, they know your conditions.”

Jarvis said to proceed directly to the emergency room, not the wellness center, during medical emergencies. (See related article on this page.)

Emergency room compensation explained

It’s a Saturday night, you don’t feel well and you decide to go to the emergency room. But you don’t have health insurance. Will the Dena’ina Wellness Center pay for your ER visit? The short answer is, “maybe.”

The Dena’ina Wellness Center can pay for ER visits for uninsured customers – un’ina – only under specific circumstances. It does not automatically cover every visit.

For the center to pay, an ER visit must be deemed a medical emergency and necessary to prevent death or serious impairment such as the loss of a limb, said Dr. John Molina, Director of Health Systems. The center may not be able to pay for the visit if it doesn’t meet that criteria. That determination is ultimately made after a Dena’ina Wellness Center provider reviews the records from the ER.

Un’ina have the option of filing an appeal if a payment is denied, and all appeals are reviewed by a committee. There is a limited amount of federal funding to pay for ER visits, Molina added, and any payments issued must adhere to federal guidelines.

“We do take those appeals seriously,” Molina said. “We look at the whole situation and make sure that we are very thorough in the appeals process.”

Molina said Central Peninsula Hospital offers a financial assistance program and that the center is happy to work with un’ina to look for alternate resources.

For additional information or if you have questions, please contact the Dena’ina Wellness Center’s refugee coordinator office at 907-335-7562 or 907-335-7563.

Wellness Center surveys now available

There’s a new option available for customers – un’ina – who wish to submit feedback about their visits to the Dena’ina Wellness Center. Paper-format surveys are now available at the registration desk in the main gathering area and at the check-in desk upstairs near the Dental Department.

The surveys, which are anonymous, range from five to eight questions depending on the nature of an un’ina’s appointment. The surveys complement an iPad-based survey already available to un’ina. The surveys are reviewed by management and used to help improve customer service.

Dr. John Molina, Director of Health Systems, said the more input un’ina give, the better.

“We encourage our un’ina to fill one out at every visit,” Molina said.

For additional information, contact Michael Cruz, Director of Quality, Compliance and Privacy, at 907-335-7571.
The Big Picture

From left, Jon Ross explains his Raven Plaza installation at the Dena’ina Wellness Center to Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott, Kenaitze Executive Council Secretary Liisia Blizzard, Executive Director Jaylene Peterson-Nyren, Toni Mallott, Council Member Clinton Lageson, Council Member Jennifer Showalter Yeoman, Council Chairperson Rosalie A. Tepp, Council Member Bernadine Atchison and Council Member Wayne Wilson during a tour of Kenaitze facilities in Kenai. Read more on Page 3.

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.
• 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
509 Upland St., Kenai, AK 99611
907-335-7287

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

Na’ini Family and Social Services, Education and Career Development
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