For Peter Imgalrea, the taste of home is never more than a cranberry away. Even if home is hundreds of miles away. “This brings me back to helping my grandma,” said Imgalrea, who grew up in Chevak. Imgalrea was among a group of students from Alaska Christian College and Kenai Peninsula College who joined tribal Elders in September to gather low-bush cranberries – hey gek’a – near Kelly and Peterson lakes in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. The trip, in its second year, was organized by the tribe’s Wellness Department and Tyotkas Elder Program in partnership with the colleges. Throughout a drizzly morning
Hello,

This fall you have the opportunity to make important choices for our state and for our country, but only if you vote. Many of the local elections in Alaska have been decided by just a few votes, so your vote really matters.

If you are not registered to vote, you have only a few days left to register for the November state and federal elections. The deadline is Oct. 9. It is an easy process that you can do online, in person or by mail.

Learn about all of the options by visiting this website, where you can register or download the registration form:
https://elections.alaska.gov/voter/register.php

You can also pick up the form at the tribe’s administration building at 150 N. Willow St., in Kenai.

Learn as much as you can about how candidates plan to support issues that are important to our people. The tribe reached out to the Alaska Democratic Party and the Alaska Republican Party with a questionnaire this fall with hopes that the parties would explain how their platform addresses issues that are important to Alaska Native people.

These are the questions we asked and that we think you should ask of anyone you want your vote:
• What is your party’s position on subsistence rights for Alaska Native people?
• What is your party’s position on subsistence rights for Alaska Native people?
• How do you think we can improve the educational gap for Alaska Native students?
• What are you doing to improve the educational gap for Alaska Native students?
• How are you working with local and/or national Native leaders to improve your highest priority issues including sanitation and basic infrastructure in rural Alaska, domestic violence and suicide?
• How are you addressing the drug and alcohol problems that affect so many rural and urban communities?

Remember, your vote counts and you can only vote if you are registered. Chagakh!

— Rosalie A. Tepp
Tribal Chairperson, Kenaitze Indian Tribe

Gerald (Jerry) Grant Brown

Tribal Elder Gerald (J erry) Grant Brown of Everett, Wash., passed away July 30 surrounded by his family. He was 82.

Jerry was born March 7, 1934, in Anchorage, and spent his childhood fishing, trapping and hunting with his father and grandfather before the family moved to Everett when he was 14.

The family moved back to Alaska three years later, but Jerry stayed in Washington. He married his high school sweetheart, Martha Birk, in 1953. Sixty-three years later, the couple had five children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Jerry began his career as an apprentice glazier before store manager of Everett Auto Glass before opening his own business, Jerry’s Auto Glass, in 1971.

While raising his family and running the business, Jerry also became one of the best free divers on the West Coast. He competed in spearfishing events, opened a dive shop, guided Jacques Cousteau expeditions, raised a Spanish gilthead in a Guatemala lake, captained whales, had adventures along the coast, and provided some of the best eating for which a family could ask.

He also took underwater photography, winning Underwater Photographer of the Year in 1974.

Note from the Council Chairperson

Chairperson

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Audre Gifford
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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: Carissa Oder
P.O. Box 988
Kenai, AK 99611

koder@kenaitze.org
907-335-7204

Looking to learn

Kenaitze has had the opportunity to share its comprehensive Dené Philosophy of Care with a range of recent visitors. At top, Tribal Doctor Estelle Thomson talks with Indian Health Service Acting Deputy Director Christopher Mandragan, Executive Director Jaylene Peterson-Nyren, Health and Human Services Acting Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary Wakefield and Director of Health Systems Dr. John Molina during an August tour of tribal facilities. Above, leaders from Maniilaq Association visited from Kotzebue to learn more about how Kenaitze has integrated health and social services. At left, Congressman Don Young learns about Tribal Court from Chief Judge Kim Sweet.

Note from the Executive Director

Yagahlit du!

The tribe’s mission is to assure the K’ahn’nah’o Dena’ina thrive forever.

For our people to thrive, we need wellness. Not just health – wellness. That is why our Dené Philosophy of Care incorporates and integrates all of the services we provide. The Dené Philosophy of Care features a holistic approach to serving our families. We believe in physical, behavioral, spiritual, educational, social and judicial wellness.

The past few months, we have had an increased interest in our philosophy, with visitors from the state and federal government, as well as other Alaska Native healthcare organizations touring our facilities to learn more about our work.

One visit was unprecedented. Health and Human Services Acting Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary Wakefield and the Indian Health Services Acting Director, Christopher Mandragan spent a full afternoon with us. They began their visit with a tour of our new Tyotkas Elder Center, from Tyotkas, we toured Na’ni Social and Family Services. After a short walk across the parking lot, we spent time talking in Tribal Court about the court’s vital role in family wellness. We ended the visit by spending time in the Dena’ina Wellness Center.

The visit was an opportunity to discuss how Alaska has unique challenges to meet. It was also an opportunity to see what the tribe has done with funds that have not always met the true need. We talked about how complex some HHS reporting requirements are and offered solutions that will be less costly, yet accountable.

After the tour, Dr. Wakefield had good things to say about the tribe. She said in an interview with KIRH-AM, Homer public radio: “It’s just phenomenal. The leadership, the commitment, the approach that is innovative in terms of the integration of a wide range of services on behalf of the people who are served here is absolutely exceptional.”

She said the story and others can be experienced at https://www.kenaitze.org.

Additional visits included Alaska VA Healthcare System Director Dr. Timothy Ballard, Congressman Don Young and leaders from the Kotzebue region’s Maniilaq Association.

The group from Maniilaq was particularly interested in how we integrate our health systems and social services systems to better serve people.

We look forward to more opportunities in the future to share what we have learned and to learn from others as we strive toward our mission: To assure K’ahn’nah’o Dena’ina thrive forever!

Chagakh!

— Jaylene Peterson-Nyren
Executive Director, Kenaitze Indian Tribe
DNA, from p. 1

analysis of the samples. Although the analysis is not fully complete, Malhi found similarities between the collected samples and Athabascan-speaking groups of the Yukon Territories in Canada.

“We see that for each one of the historic individuals, it falls generally with Athabascan speaking individuals, so that’s interesting,” Malhi said. “And if we look at the mitochondrial genome, we see a similar pattern.”

To establish the connection, Malhi compared the DNA of the ancient human remains against a database of other indigenous groups that have had DNA analyzed. Malhi said the database does not include any other Athabascan speaking groups from Alaska, though it does include others such as Yup’ik.

During his 2015 visit to Kenai, Malhi also took saliva samples from living tribal members. Those samples will be compared to the samples he’s been analyzing, Malhi added.

“So we are following their direction,” Lindgren said.

Malhi is focusing on two parts of the human genome as part of the project – the mitochondrial genome and the nuclear genome. The mitochondrial genome, he said, is maternally inherited and traces only one maternal line. The nuclear genome is much larger and traces all a person’s ancestors. Technological advances over the past 10 years have allowed DNA specialists to more quickly and accurately analyze the nuclear genome, Malhi added.

Dr. Alan Boraas, an anthropology professor at Kenai Peninsula College who also has championed the project – the mitochondrial genome study – said it’s an important effort. He acknowledged the sensitive nature of DNA testing, but said it will benefit the tribe for years to come.

“DNA is a very personal thing. It’s a very tribal thing,” Boraas said. “DNA is not going to tell you how Dena’ina you are, but DNA does have a track record of events... that tell a history.”

Tribal Elder and project champion Sasha Lindgren said the decision to do DNA testing before reburying the remains goes back to the mid-1990s. At the time, the tribe had been working with a physical anthropologist who explained what kind of information DNA testing could reveal. About 35 tribal Elders gave their blessing to culturally appropriate, minimal testing.

“DNA is not going to tell you how Dena’ina you are, but DNA will benefit the tribe for years to come,” Boraas said. “It’s a very tribal thing.”

Heather Daniels, the tribe’s coordinator, said the program is still in the planning and development phase as it recruits volunteers.

“The Senior Companion Program is really built around that social aspect,” Daniels said. “I really encourage that person-to-person link.”

Volunteers may assist with daily tasks, but Daniels said they are not case managers. Instead, the focus is on forming long-lasting, meaningful relationships.

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Clockwise from above: Racers run past the Kenaitze Indian Tribe’s Dena’ina Wellness Center at the start of the CASA Superhero 5-kilometer run/walk. Amy Drake runs as Wonder Woman. Brooklyn Stewart, 8, is all smiles as the Green Lantern. The Superhero run was his first 5k. Angie Kenner helps her daughter Kelsie and the CASA Superhero 5-kilometer run/walk.

Tribe hosts 4th Annual Superhero 5K Run/Walk to benefit CASA

It’s not every day that 13-year-old Jaron Kenner gets to dress up as Star Wars hero Hans Solo.

So when he had the chance to participate in the tribe’s 4th Annual Superhero 5K Run/Walk – which not only allows superheroes costumes, but encourages them – he wasn’t about to turn it down. Even if it meant running to a finish line far, far way.

“It was fun, but my legs feel tired, like rubber,” Kenner said shortly after finishing the race.

About 70 people turned out for the Aug. 20 event, a family friendly affair that took racers from the Dena’ina Wellness Center on a meandering loop through Kenai. Proceeds went to the tribe’s Court Appointed Special Advocates program – CASA – which supports children going through the state and tribal court systems.

The field of participants was as diverse as the attire they wore.

One mother dressed as Wonder Woman and pushed a baby stroller across the finish line. A man wore a Batman mask held together by duct tape. Then there was the school-age boy who doubled as the Green Lantern, the woman who sported Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles gaff, and the entire family who dressed as The Incredibles.

“It’s really great to see people enjoying it,” said Thia Peters, CASA program coordinator. “That’s been the best part of my day so far.”

Homer residents and first-time participants Leonid Isaev and Michelle Mitchell crossed the finish line in first and second place, respectively. Isaev, who was a member of the Soviet National Team in his running heyday, is Mitchell’s coach.

Mitchell had anticipated running a 50-kilometer race in Anchorage on the day of the CASA event, but those plans fell through. She enjoyed the course’s hilly sections because she’s accustomed to running on a grade on the outskirts of Homer.

And as a teacher at Voznesenka School, Mitchell was happy to support the race.

“I like to see my money going to help kids,” she said.

Third-place finisher Bill Taylor, a public defender who lives between Kasilof and Clam Gulch, first competed in the event last year.

Aptly dressed as The Punisher, Taylor prefers longer-distance races but was happy to step up for the race. He wore rubber, “I love it,” Taylor said. “It was beautiful. Perfect day for it, a little breeze to keep you cool. No rain. It was a nice change.”

Meanwhile, Kenner, a student at Skyview Middle School, enjoyed a section of the course that gave racers a view of the beach near the mouth of the Kenai River. It was his third time participating in the race, and he dressed up as Pac-Man last year.

Kenner’s mother and sisters also competed, wearing Star Wars costumes of their own. Kelsie Kenner, 11, who dressed as Princess Leah, said it was a fun race but that she was happy to step across the finish line.

“It’s tiring,” she said. 

The afternoon also included a barbecue lunch, costume contest and giveaways. Prizes for the race’s top finishers included a Resurrection Bay tour and gift cards.

For Peters, it was rewarding and uplifting to see the show of support for CASA.

“It’s amazing to see such supporters come out,” Peters said. “It makes me feel really good that our community is wanting and willing to help our children that are in need.”
Dena’ina Wellness Center recognizes Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The Dena’ina Wellness Center will host an array of women’s wellness promotions throughout October as part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Breast cancer is a leading cause of death among women, but early detection can go a long way toward saving lives. Mammograms are a proven method for early detection, which increases the chances of successful treatment. Here’s some helpful information about this important screening method:

What is a mammogram? A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray exam of the breasts to look for changes that are not normal. The results are recorded on a x-ray film or directly into a computer for a doctor to radiologist to examine. A mammogram allows the doctor to have a closer look for changes in breast tissue that can’t be felt during a breast exam. It is especially for women who have no breast complaints and for women who have breast symptoms, such as a change in the size or shape of a breast, a lump, nipple discharge, or pain. Breast changes can also occur in almost all women. In fact, most of these changes are not cancer and are called “benign,” but only a doctor can tell for sure. Breast changes can also happen monthly, due to your menstrual period.

How is a mammogram done? Special x-ray machines are used to take a special x-ray machine. The person who takes the x-rays, called a radiologic technologist, places the breasts, one at a time, between an x-ray plate and a plate-like x-ray machine. The plates are attached to the x-ray machine and compress the breasts to flatten them. This spreads the breast tissue out to make it easier for the x-ray machine to see the breasts. This may cause you some discomfort; you might feel a little tingly or pinched. This feeling only lasts for a few seconds, and the harder you breath, the better the picture. Most often, two pictures are taken of each breast — one from the side and one from above. A screening mammogram takes about 20 minutes from start to finish.

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Back-to-school season is here, so it’s time for parents to get children school supplies and back packs. It is also time for parents to ensure their children, and themselves, are up to date on vaccines. To celebrate the importance of immunizations for people of all ages – and make sure children are protected with all the vaccines they need as they go back to school – the Dena’ina Wellness Center joined the Kenai Peninsula health partners, nationwide in observance of National Immunization Awareness Month. And this fall, the Wellness center will offer flu vaccinations.

The Wellness Center team is here to answer your questions,“if you have any questions, someone is here to answer your questions,”

If you were to take 1 million footsteps, how would you do it? Run laps around a track? Hike tall mountains? Compete in marathons?
Sam Hodena didn’t need to go much beyond her own backyard. Hodena recently completed the “Let’s MOVE Kenai!” Summer Challenge hosted by the tribe’s Wellness Department. The challenge began May 1 and ended Aug. 31 under a simple premise: Wear a pedometer, a device that tracks footsteps, and take as many steps as possible.

Hodena finished with 3,153,952 steps and was the first un’ina – “those who come to us” – to reach the 1-million mark. Employee Amber Shepherd won the challenge with 3,158,827 steps.

“I just knew I walked a lot,” Hodena said. “I didn’t really have any expectations.”

Hodena, who regularly participates in activities at the Tytokas Elder Center, attributed her success to a variety of activities but emphasized one above all — gardening.

Each summer, Hodena spends a couple hours a day tending to her flowers and vegetables on a 20-acre parcel of land in Nikiski, where she has lived for 25 years. Although her garden does not stretch the entire property – which includes a 30-by-60-foot fruit greengarden – it requires a significant amount of walking.

Hodena began gardening as a hobby through her husband, who is also an avid gardener. She grows oriental poppies, calendula, zinnias, lettuce, celery, corn, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, squash and beans, and more.

Her favorites to eat? Snap peas and cucumbers — “That’s the fun part,” Hodena said. “And it tastes really good too.”

Hodena, who moved to Alaska in 1957 and has lived in numerous areas across the state, began participating in fitness activities at the Dena’ina Wellness Center in 1995. Her first experiment was at “Turkey Boot Camp” before Thanksgiving.
Priscilla Russell gives a presentation about traditional uses of wild plants during the Harvest Moon Local Food Festival.

Local author discusses nutritional and medicinal plant uses in Dena’ina culture

Priscilla Russell played the part of student much of her adult life, studying the Dena’ina people. Now she’s playing the part of teacher. Russell, an author who lives in Anchorage, Point, delivered a presentation about the Dena’ina people at the Harvest Moon Local Food Festival organized by the Kenai Local Food Connection in August. The festival, which spanned a week, featured a series of community events, workshops and seminars focusing on healthy foods.

Russell’s presentation, which occurred at the Dena’ina Wellness Center – one of many events the center hosted during the festival – focused on how the Dena’ina people use plants for medicinal and nutritional purposes. As part of the presentation, Russell narrated a slideshow featuring decades-old photos she captured while spending time with Dena’ina people.

She discussed how Dena’ina used – and still use – plants such as devil’s club, cow parsnip, wormwood, angelica, chocolate lily and fiddlehead ferns. She also emphasized how important blueberries and low-bush cranberries are to the Dena’ina.

Russell also overviewed traditional uses of birch and spruce trees, as well as ways Dena’ina people use steam baths and fish traps.

“The wilderness – the land – was their store, where they got everything,” Russell said. “They were brilliant people, and still are.”

In addition to a public presentation, Russell also shared the slideshow in a private viewing for members of the Executive Council and tribal Elders. Those attending had a chance to ask questions and offer their own perspectives.

Tribal Elder Clare Swan said she appreciated Russell’s work and enjoyed reflecting on her own life.

“The memories are great,” Swan said.

Russell, who moved to Alaska from the East Coast in 1973, traveled extensively across the state studying Alaska Native culture. She has since published books about her experiences.

One of the most influential people in Russell’s life, she said, was Fedosia Sacaloff, the half-sister of Dena’ina linguist and author Peter Kalifornsky. Although she was blind, Russell said Sacaloff was a wealth of knowledge.

Sharing the knowledge she learned from Sacaloff and other Dena’ina people is an honor, Russell said.

“It’s kind of like going back in time, down memory lane,” she said. “It’s very special.”

Russell talks about cow parsnip, also known as wild celery, while she projects a historical photo of Fedosia Sacaloff harvesting the plant’s roots during the Harvest Moon Local Food Festival.

BERRIES, from p. 1

and into the afternoon, students and Elders alike scanned the damp ground for clusters of the nutrient-rich berries. They fanned out in different directions, some resting on all fours, others bending down, and plucked the bushes until the blue plastic buckets began to fill. Imgalrea, who moved to the Kenai area in 2014 after he enrolled at AIC, said the experience reminded him of home. Many evenings as a child, he picked berries on the tundra alongside family members.

And on this day, he and his fellow students gave a bucket of their berries to Elders.

“Helping people is good,” Imgalrea said.

For fellow student Katherine Woolk, an anthropology major, it was an entirely new yet equally rewarding experience. She said she had no idea there could be so many berries in such a small radius.

“It’s been very relaxing,” Woolk said. “And I think that’s the whole point of being out here, just being together and learning a little bit about the ground that’s underneath us, and being outside and enjoying the great outdoors.”

Elder Pauline Penland, who was born and raised in Alaska and has lived on the Kenai Peninsula for 12 years, admitted she, too, was new to the activity. Until this trip, she didn’t know where to go to pick low-bush cranberries.

A regular participant in Yortkas Elder Center activities, Penland planned to make cranberry sauce and bread with the berries she picked.

And although she was struggling with pain due to a torn meniscus, it didn’t take her long to find a good berry-picking strategy.

“I learned to follow the pros,” she said during a break. “I’m going to sit down for a while and see if I can rejuvenate my legs and, if I can, I’m going back out.”

Sonora Shaginoff-Stuart, KPC’s Rural and Native Student Services Coordinator, said the experience was meaningful to her students for many reasons.

Some of her students were raised far away but picked berries as children, so the activity helped with homesickness and connected them to each other and the community. Additionally, she said, it’s important for students to be near Elders and to respect them – something many of them learn growing up.

“Our Elders give us our footing for what we need in life,” Shaginoff-Stuart said. “I really like that a lot of our Native students who come to school understand that already. They automatically know the importance of how to take care of them and watch out for them and to respect them.”

For years, low-bush cranberries have been important to the Dena’ina culture. Rich in nutrients, the berries are used for jams, breads, ice cream and even medicinal purposes.

Tia Holley, who works in the tribe’s Wellness Department, said the berries can be picked in fall or spring. In fall, she said, they turn ripe when temperatures cool. When snow arrives, berries are buried and protected until spring. Many of those attending agreed it would be nice to hold the event again next year.

“It’s been great,” Penland said. “It’s just nice to be out here with other Elders.”

Bessie Philip uses a berry picker her uncle, Jack Gousk, made to harvest low-bush cranberries during a field trip with with Elders and college students to Kelly/Peterson Lakes. The students are from Chevak.

Harvesting good health

The Dena’ina Wellness Center played host to numerous events during the 2016 Harvest Moon Local Food Festival. Events the tribe hosted included a children’s healthy food workshop, a dandelion cooking demonstration for children; a wild plant workshop; a slideshow about ancient, modern and future world foods; a plant fermentation workshop; and a workshop on canning and preserving wild salmon. The festival, in its fourth year, was organized by the Kenai Local Food Connection, an informal group of local food advocates. The tribe’s Wellness Department offers an abundance of information about traditional foods and healthy eating. To learn more, please contact the center at 335-7500.
The Big Picture

Dr. Mary Wakefield, Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, visits with young people at Kenaitze’s Early Childhood Center during her tour of Kenaitze facilities in August. The tribe hosted several high-level visits during the past couple of months. Read more on P. 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.
• 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 Program
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