

# The Counting Cord

## Nitnuqeyishi



September–October 2016

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE NEWSLETTER

## Gathering *hey gek'a*

### Elders, students come together to pick low-bush cranberries

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

See **BERRIES**, p. 11



Marie Anderson looks at the low-bush cranberries that Peter Imgalrea was helping her pick during an Elders and students berry picking field trip to Kelly/Peterson Lakes in September. Imgalrea is a student at Alaska Christian College in Soldotna.

## Anthropology professor offers update on Dena'ina DNA project

Ancient human remains discovered in the Kenai area share similarities in DNA to other northern Athabascan speaking groups, says an anthropology professor who specializes in DNA analysis at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Dr. Ripan Malhi reported the finding during a presentation to tribal members at the Dena'ina Wellness Center in July. Malhi has been working with the tribe for the past year on a DNA study aimed at examining the Dena'ina genome and establishing a connection between Dena'ina people and early occupations of Alaska.

In 2015, in partnership with the tribe, Malhi collected samples of ancient human remains discovered in areas believed to be previously inhabited by Dena'ina people. He has since been conducting a DNA

See **DNA**, p. 4



Dr. Ripan Malhi presents the latest findings from his DNA research project involving members of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe during a meeting at the Dena'ina Wellness Center in July.

## Building bonds

### Elders support Elders through tribe's Senior Companion Program

Laura Hobson and Nancy Nelson walked into the store, one after the other, and began peering at the collection of antiques.

“Oh, this is pretty,” said Hobson, pointing to a lamp.

“Look at this,” said Nelson, running her hand along the edge of a handheld mirror.

The women stayed close, a few strides apart, slowly moving past rows of lamps, figurines and dishes.

“I remember these. Wow, the tea used to taste so good,” said Nelson, holding up a kettle. “It’s good to be nostalgic every now and then.”

Recently, Hobson and Nelson have been creating new memories as participants in the tribe’s Senior

See **COMPANION**, p. 5



## NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Yaghali du!

The tribe's mission is to assure the Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina thrive forever.

For our people to thrive, we need wellness. Not just health – *wellness*. That is why our Dene' Philosophy of Care incorporates and integrates all of the services we provide.

The Dene' 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 Mandregan spent a full afternoon with us. They began their visit with a tour of our new Tyotkas Elder Center. From Tyotkas, we toured Na'ini 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 show 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 in an interview with KBBI-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/press/>.

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 have integrated 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 Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina thrive forever!

Chiqinik,

— Jaylene Peterson-Nyren  
Executive Director, Kenaitze Indian Tribe



## Looking to learn

Kenaitze has had the opportunity to share its comprehensive Dene' Philosophy of Care with a range of recent visitors. At top, Tribal Doctor Estelle Thomson talks with Indian Health Service Acting Deputy Director Christopher Mandregan, 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.

## Moving soon? Please keep in touch

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

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## From the editor's desk

The Counting Cord is a publication for members of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the tribe's customers.

Find more information on the tribe's website at [kenaitze.org](http://kenaitze.org) and like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/kenaitze](https://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](mailto:smoon@kenaitze.org).



## NOTE FROM THE COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

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 does matter.

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/vi\\_vr\\_how.php](https://elections.alaska.gov/vi_vr_how.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 addressed issues that are important to Alaska Native people. Neither party responded.

These are the questions we asked, and that we think you should ask of anyone who

wants your vote:

- What is your party's position on subsistence rights for Alaska Native people?
- Does the party have a solution to resolve the conflict between the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 and the state of Alaska's Constitution with respect to subsistence?

- How do you think we can improve the educational gap for Alaska Native students?
  - What are you doing to improve the economic standing of Alaska Native people?
  - How are you working with local and/or national Native people to improve their 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 affects so many rural and urban communities?
- Remember, your vote counts and you can only vote if you are registered. Chiqinik!

— Rosalie A. Tepp  
Tribal Chairperson, Kenaitze Indian Tribe

## Bequsilna: 'those who are gone'

Tribal Elder Gerald (Jerry) 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, 14 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Jerry began his career as an apprentice glazier and became 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 galleon in a Guatemala lake, captured killer whales, had adventures along the coast, and provided some of the best eating for which a family could ask.

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



Gerald (Jerry) Grant Brown

also fished the Kenaitze Indian Tribe's net many summers.

Family was important to Jerry. He and Martha spent many hours researching their families, and traveled to Norway, Sweden and across Alaska to document the family. The family built a cabin on the west side of San Juan Island where they spent many great days diving, fishing and playing.

Jerry is survived by his wife of 63 years, Martha Birk Brown; children Chris (Rene) Brown of Everett, Wash.; Alisa (Martin) Garrigues of Anchorage, Alaska; John (Kelly) Brown of Fairbanks, Alaska; Keith (Paige) Brown of Camano Island, Wash.; and Keri Bartlett of Marysville, Wash.; as well as many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews and cousins.

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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 Yupik.

During his 2015 visit to Kenai, Malhi also took saliva samples from living tribal members. Those samples will be compared to the remains he’s been analyzing, seeking to establish a connection. Malhi said he will have an update on that effort next year.

“This is a good first step,” he said.

The remains with which Malhi is working were held in the state’s archaeology office for years, but were repatriated to the tribe for reburial.



Jasmine Koster, in cap, asks a question during the presentation about DNA research.

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.

“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, 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.”



Nancy Nelson and Laura Hobson look at antiques in a curio store during a shopping trip. Both are participating in the tribe’s Senior Companion Program. The program matches trained volunteers over the age of 55 with fellow Elders who need assistance.

COMPANION, from p. 1

Companion Program. The program matches trained volunteers over the age of 55 with fellow Elders who have physical, emotional or mental hindrances. Volunteers offer support to Elder recipients in a range of areas, forming a companionship. The tribe launched the program about a year ago through its Tyotkas Elder Program.

Hobson and Nelson were paired together a few months ago.

Hobson, a volunteer – or “companion” – moved with her husband from Anchorage to Soldotna two years ago and is retired after a 20-year career in banking. She had been looking for ways to help people in her free time.

“I thought right away that it would be interesting. I thought I would learn something from it,” Hobson said. “I like working with people. I like to be helpful. I’ve always been that way.”

Nelson, a recipient, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and rents a single room in a Soldotna boarding house. She had been seeking a healthy outlet from that living arrangement.

“I felt stuck in a rut and isolated, even when I was around people,” Nelson said.

Hobson and Nelson have formed a strong bond since being paired through the program. They meet once a week, usually on Tuesdays, and enjoy a range of activities.

They spent time together in Seward as part of a group field trip organized by Tyotkas, enjoy shopping – especially for antiques, as they did on this day – and frequently go out to lunch.

Nelson said she often feels claustrophobic at the boarding house, but meeting Hobson has helped put her at ease.

“It’s helping me emotionally because it takes me out of the rut,” Nelson said. “I feel happier, I feel like I can breathe again.”

Heather Daniels, the tribe’s



Nancy Nelson and Laura Hobson are each benefiting from their participation in the tribe’s Senior Companion Program.

## Find your companion

To learn more about the Senior Companion Program, please contact Heather Daniels at 907-335-7282. The program is seeking volunteers as well as recipients.

Senior Companion Program coordinator, said the program is still in the planning and development phase as it recruits volunteers. Currently, the program has two volunteers and about six recipients. Daniels hopes both those numbers soon grow.

Volunteers, who receive a stipend, must serve at least 15 hours per week. In addition to being at least 55 years old, volunteers also must meet income and other eligibility requirements. They go through a

thorough training program – Hobson said it took a couple months to complete – before they are paired with recipients.

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

ingful relationships.

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

Nelson said she was skeptical about the program before she joined because she didn’t know what to expect. Now, though, the highlight of her week is spending time with Hobson.

“She helps me in a lot of ways that I did not expect,” Nelson said. “I look forward to the time I get to spend with her. I’m usually not very selfish, but with the time I get to spend with her, I am selfish.”

Hobson said it’s rewarding to work with Nelson and other recipients because she can see the difference it makes in their lives.

And although Hobson and Nelson were regular participants in Tyotkas activities before they joined the Senior Companion Program, they knew little about each other.

Now they are good friends.

“With people like her, I can’t help but smile,” Nelson said.

## Community needs survey to be mailed this fall



This fall, tribal members will receive a survey in the mail from the McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm.

The purpose of the survey is to gather opinions about community needs for tribal programs and services. The survey can be completed through the mail or online.

Households that complete a survey will be entered into a drawing for a generous prize.

For additional information, please contact Bob Koenitzer at 866-586-6133.





**4th Annual Superhero 5K Run/Walk**  
 1. Leonid Isaev; 2. Michelle Mitchell; 3. Bill Taylor; 4. Jamie Nelson; 5. Brooke Pollock; 6. Indigo Merritt; 7. Shari BeDunnah; 8. Carter Cannava; 9. Unnamed; 10. Peter Cannava; 11. Jim Krein; 12. Elizabeth Floersch; 13. Amy Drake; 14. Elaine Legasse; 15. Elias Machen-Grey; 16. Zachary Stockton; 17. Ariana Cannava; 18. Katrina Cannava; 19. Cooper Darling; 20. Katie Tallent; 21. Jessica Goggia; 22. Maria Sweppy; 23. Unnamed; 24. Nikiesha Richards; 25. MaryJane Hadaway; 26. Michael Tallent; 27. Ayla Tallent; 28. Kelsie Kenner; 29. Penny Furnish; 30. Elizabeth Anders; 31. Nadia Anders; 32. Jaron Kenner; 33. Natalie Kohler; 34. Neil Reuton; 35. Natasha Reuton; 36. Taylor Huett; 37. Ellis Womack; 38. Karen Hobart; 39. Bert Womack; 40. Audrey Anderson; 41. Courtney Sullivan; 42. Brooklynn Chadburn; 43. Chelsey Carter; 44. Yvonne Oren; 45. Malakai BeDunnah; 46. Robert Hunter; 47. Natalie Stewart; 48. Justine Stewart; 49. Khloey BeDunnah; 50. Jennifer Tollackson; 51. Michelle Higuchi; 52. Kelly Lawson; 53. Karlee Kenner; 54. Angie Kenner; 55. Brooklynn Stewart; 56. Rita Magee; 57. Kathy Calloway; 58. Emma Karron; 59. Annaleah Karron; 60. Kristie Stockton; 61. Beckey Howard; 62. Hector Teran; 63. Will Phillips; 64. Jack Phillips; 65. Suzanne Phillips; 66. Sailor Tallent; 67. Julie Annell; 68. Gianna Rivera-Cruz; 69. Bethany Kompkoff; 70. Alina Kompkoff; 71. Becki Kompkoff.



# Making the kilometers count



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. Brooklynn Stewart, 8, is all smiles as the Green Lantern. The Superhero run was his first 5k. Angie Kenner helps her daughter Kelsie and son Jaron prepare for the race start. The family ran as their favorite Star Wars characters.

## 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 superhero 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 garb, 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 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

### Become a CASA volunteer

The CASA program, which pairs trained adult volunteers with vulnerable children going through the court system, is seeking volunteers. Volunteers attend court proceedings to advocate on behalf of children who have no other voice. To get involved, please contact Thia Peters at 907-335-7219. Periodically, the program hosts informational meetings.

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 attended the CASA event to train for a half-marathon and because he believes in the cause.

"I loved 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 to know that our community is wanting and willing to help our children that are in need."



# Yaghali Nusdlan

*He or she got well*



## Achieving wellness, one step at a time

Summer challenge promotes healthy habits, and friendly competition, with pedometers



Sam Hodena laughs as she takes a break from her workout at the Dena'ina Wellness Center to talk about the miles she covered during the center's "Let's MOVE Kenaitze! Summer Challenge."

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 Kenaitze! 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 1,513,952 steps and was the first un'ina – "those who comes to us" – to reach the 1-million mark. Employee Amber Shepherd won the challenge with 1,568,827 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 Tyotkas 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 10-foot-by-10-foot greenhouse – it requires a significant amount of walking.

Hodena began gardening as a hobby through her husband, who also an avid gardener.

She grows oriental poppies, columbines, carrots, celery, corn, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, squash and beans, and more.

Her favorites to eat? Snap peas and zucchini squash.

"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 2015. Her first experience was at "Turkey Boot Camp" before Thanksgiving.

After the workout, participants were challenged to hold a "plank" – a position similar to a pushup – for as long as possible. Hodena, one of the older participants, won.

"She just jumped right into it, it was pretty awesome," said Levi Sutton, the tribe's fitness supervisor.

Since then, Hodena has been a regular at the center.

She came in at least once a week during summer to exercise and report her steps on the pedometer. The commitment paid off, too, as she lost 10 pounds.

Hodena attributed the success not only to her gardening and active lifestyle, but to the support she received from staff members at the center.

"They are very knowledgeable so if you have any questions, someone is here to answer your questions,"

Hodena said before a recent workout. "They make it fun here."

Sutton said the pedometer challenge was created to encourage people to keep moving during summer, without nagging them to come to the gym every day. Since Alaska summers are short, Sutton added, many people prefer to be outside than in a gym.

The pedometers met that demand. "This way we could see how many steps they were taking and encourage them to hit their goals every day," Sutton said. "It's an easy way to track progress without having fancy fitness items."

Sutton said about 75 people consistently reported their steps as part of the challenge. Others requested pedometers to use on their own.

Wellness center staff awarded prizes as part of the competition,

and participants were able to track their standing during weekly check-ins.

"It was a fun program to implement," Sutton said. "We are always trying to figure out ways to encourage people, because fitness can be a hard one to get people motivated if they aren't motivated on their own."

Hodena plans to continue participating in fitness activities at the center.

And to supplement her workouts during winter, without gardening, she'll walk her five dogs, swim and snowshoe.

"It's a lifestyle thing," Hodena said.

To learn more about fitness opportunities at the Dena'ina Wellness Center, please call 907-335-7588.

## Understanding mammograms

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 one 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 x-ray film or directly into a computer for a doctor called a radiologist to examine. A mammogram allows the doctor to have a closer look for changes in breast tissue that cannot be felt during a breast exam. It is used for women who have no breast complaints and for women who have breast symptoms, such as a change in the shape or size of a breast, a lump, nipple discharge, or pain. Breast changes occur in almost all women. In fact, most of these changes are not cancer and are called "benign," but only a doctor can know for sure. Breast changes can also happen monthly, due to your menstrual period.

### How is a mammogram done?

You stand in front of a special x-ray machine. The person who takes the x-rays, called a radiologic technician, places your breasts, one at a time, between an x-ray plate and a plastic plate. These plates are attached to the x-ray machine and compress the breasts to flatten them. This spreads the breast tissue out to obtain a clearer picture. You will feel pressure on your breast for a few seconds. It may cause you some discomfort; you might feel squeezed or pinched. This feeling only lasts for a few seconds, and the flatter your breast, 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.

### How often should I get a mammogram?

Here are the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommendations:

- Women ages 50 to 74 should get a mammogram every two years.
- Women younger than 50 should talk to a doctor about when to start and how often to get a mammogram.

### What is the best method of detecting breast cancer as early as possible?

A high-quality mammogram plus a clinical breast exam, an exam done by your doctor, is the most effective way to detect breast cancer early. Finding breast cancer early greatly improves a woman's chances for successful treatment. Like any test, mammograms have both benefits and limitations. For example, some cancers can't be found by a mammogram, but they may be found in a clinical breast exam. Checking your own breasts for lumps or other changes is called a breast self-exam (BSE). Studies so far have not shown that BSE alone helps reduce the number of deaths from breast cancer. BSE should not take the place of routine clinical breast exams and mammograms. If you choose to do BSE, remember that breast changes can

occur because of pregnancy, aging, menopause, menstrual cycles, or from taking birth control pills or other hormones. It is normal for breasts to feel a little lumpy and uneven. Also, it is common for breasts to be swollen and tender right before or during a menstrual period. If you notice any unusual changes in your breasts, contact your doctor.

The Dena'ina Wellness Center does not offer mammograms, but is happy to make referrals for un'ina – those who come to us. For additional information, please contact the center at 907-335-7500.

Information courtesy of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Women's Health.

## Keep your children, and yourself, protected from serious diseases

National Immunization Awareness Month emphasizes importance of vaccines; flu shots to be available soon

Back-to-school season is here, so it's time for parents to gather school supplies and back packs. It's 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 with public health partners nationwide in recognizing August as National Immunization Awareness Month.

And this fall, the wellness center will offer flu vaccinations to its un'ina – "those who come to us." Those interested in receiving the vaccine are encouraged to do so before the end of October.

"Getting children all of the vaccines recommended by CDC's (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) immunization schedule is one of the most important things parents can do to protect their children from serious diseases," said Heather Callum, a pediatric doctor at the wellness center. "If you haven't done so already, now is a good time to check with your child's provider to find out what vaccines your child needs."

Vaccines protect against a number of serious and potentially life-threatening diseases.

When children are not vaccinated, they are at increased risk for diseases and can also spread diseases to others in their classrooms and community – including babies who are too young to be fully vaccinated, and people with weakened immune systems due to cancer or other health conditions. Talk to your child's health care provider to find out which vaccines are recommended for them before going back to school. "Children who don't receive recommended vaccines are at risk of getting the disease or illness, and of having a severe case," Callum said. "Every dose of every vaccine is important to protect your child and others in the community from infectious diseases."

In the United States, vaccines have greatly reduced infectious diseases that once routinely harmed or killed many infants, children and adults. Influenza has ravaged Alaska Native people in the past, decimating entire villages during an outbreak in 1918-19. However, the viruses and bacteria that cause vaccine-preventable disease still exist and can cause illness in people who are not protected by vaccines.

Every year, tens of thousands of Americans still suffer serious health problems, are hospitalized, and even die from diseases that could be prevented by vaccines.

## Fight the flu

- Protect yourself, protect others—get a flu vaccine every year.
- Prevent the spread of germs—cover coughs and sneezes.

To learn more, visit [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)

### Don't wait, act now

Here are a few reasons it's worth getting vaccinated:

- Many vaccine-preventable diseases are still common in the U.S.
- Those that are not common here are still found in other parts of the world, and can still be a threat.
- Some of these diseases are very contagious.
- Any of these diseases could be serious – even for healthy people.
- Certain people may be at higher risk for getting some diseases or having more serious illness if they were to get sick, like young children, older adults, and those with health conditions.

Please contact the Dena'ina Wellness Center at 907-335-7500 for more information about vaccines.



# 'A walk down memory lane'



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



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.

### 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 wild 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 about 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.

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 Anchor 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 and high-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, travelled 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 added.

"It's kind of like going back in time, down memory lane," she said. "It's very special."

**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 ACC, 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 Wolk, 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," Wolk 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 Tyotkas 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 the 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."

Sondra 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



Bessie Phillip uses a berry picker her uncle, Jack Gosuk, made to harvest low-bush cranberries during a field trip with Elders and college students to Kelly/Peterson Lakes.

talk to 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."



Martina Georges, right, watches as Alaska Christian College students Peter Imgalrea, Ida Nash, Vanessa Joe and Trish Tuluk dance and sing Yupik songs playing from a phone during lunch. The students are from Chevak.



# 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](http://kenaitze.org)  
**On Facebook:** [facebook.com/kenaitze](https://facebook.com/kenaitze)

