Blended learning: A new way to connect

The COVID-19 pandemic may have changed the way the Tribe is able to deliver services, but it hasn’t stopped the learning.

The Tribe’s education programs continue to evolve to provide opportunities for learners and their families. Education staff are using a blended learning model, combining in-person and online learning.

A blended learning program had been in development for the past year, but the restrictions that have been part of the COVID-19 pandemic put the need for it front and center.

“We knew we needed to connect with families,” said Rachel Gilbert, Education Director.

In December, education staff are providing a number of regular learning opportunities, using Zoom to connect with learners and their families. Activities being presented include Native Youth Olympics, with sessions catered to different ages; percussion; wood carving; cooking; traditional crafts; Dena’ina cultural time; “Read with Me”; and Dena’ina Language Club.

Gilbert said staff would be “field testing” the classes to see what works best for distance delivery. At the end of the month, participating families will be asked to provide feedback so the offerings can be adjusted as needed.

Over the summer, the Education division launched the Family Lunch Box program as the start of its Culinary Wellness curriculum. The program introduced families to distance learning, and ensured each family has the learning tools they need to prepare meals together.

Meeting the need

Tribe shoulders challenges of COVID-19

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tribe has taken steps to continue to provide services and support while protecting the health and safety of Tribal Members, employees, and those the Tribe serves.

The Tribe has received more than $18 million in funding from a number of sources to help with its pandemic response. The CARES Act provided funding through the Department of the Treasury, the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Additional grant funding was received from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, the Office of Community Service’s Community Service Block Grant.
Plowing, sanding available for Elders, disabled Tribal Members

Kenaitze Tribal Elders and disabled Tribal Members who live in the Tribe’s service area may now apply for snow plowing and sanding services.

The Tribal Council recently updated the policy on Tribally funded snow plowing and sanding services. The change allows the Tribe to provide snow plowing and sanding for Tribal Elders and disabled Tribal Members who do not qualify for Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act funding.

The Tribe’s service area covers the western Kenai Peninsula between Point Possession and Kasilof, including Cooper Landing, Kenai, Nikiski, Soldotna and Sterling. Snow plowing and sanding will be provided where contractors are available.

Snow plowing will be provided after accumulation of three or more inches or snow.

Sanding will occur in the event of icy conditions.

To apply for snow plowing and sanding services, contact Tribal Member Services at 907-335-7200, or use the contact form at www.kenaitze.org/tribal-member-services/.

From the editor’s desk

The Counting Cord is a publication for members of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the people served by the Tribe.

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

For story suggestions or questions about content, contact editor M. Scott Moon at 907-335-7257 or by email at mmoon@kenaitze.org.
Kenaitze Tribal Members elected three candidates to the Tribal Council, with voting results announced during the Oct. 3 Annual General Membership Meeting.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually, with Tribal Members watching via the internet. The Tribal Council election was conducted via mail-in voting, with absentee ballots sent to eligible voters in August.

Tribal Members re-elected Mary Ann Mills and Diana L. Zirul, and elected Virginia Wolf to the Council. All three will serve two-year terms.

Mills received the most votes with 152. Wolf received 110 votes, and 106 went to Zirul.

Other candidates receiving votes were Sharon Isaak with 87; Ronette Stanton, 74; Jimmy Coveyou, 58; and Audre Gifford and Jennifer Yeoman, each with one vote.

Members of the Council not up for election this year were Wayne D. Wilson Jr., Bernadine Atchison, Clinton Lageson and Liissa Blizzard. Following the annual meeting, Council Members selected the same slate of officers for the coming year. Wilson will continue to serve as Chair, Atchison as Vice Chair, Lageson as Treasurer, and Zirul as Secretary.

Isaak was appointed to the Council later in October, after Lageson resigned from his seat. Zirul stepped into the Treasurer position, and Blizzard was selected as Secretary.

At the start of the annual meeting, four Tribal Members were recognized for their contributions to the Tribe’s past, present and future success.

Robert Fulton, a past Tribal Council Member and Tribal Court judge, was recognized for “bringing the Tribe to a good place through leading by example,” said Mills.

Emil Dolchok “was a true friend, teacher and mentor” who worked to protect the Kenai River for his people, according to a letter from Susan Wells, as read by Isaak.

Rita Smagge served as the Tribe’s Executive Director for many years. Under her leadership, the Tribe began applying for grants for energy assistance, health care, and youth programs. The Tribe also established the Tribal Court and educational fishery during her tenure.

Chelsea Hendriks, currently the Tribal Programs Director, was recognized for the work she’s done for Tribal Members and Elders during the pandemic, including the expansion of meal deliveries for Elders.

“Every day, I see her walking the path of our traditional values,” Atchison said.

The Tribe’s work to provide services throughout the pandemic was highlighted with a series of video updates. The videos focused on the Elder program meal delivery expansion; Behavioral Health’s move to new space at Chaq’uya Qenq’al, Birch Tree House, on the Den’a’ina Wellness Center Campus; progress on the new education campus; remodeling at the Den’a’ina Wellness Center; and work at the educational fishery.

“In a time that has been very difficult for all of us, our Tribe has grown and shown a strength to be proud of,” said Wilson.

In his report, Wilson noted several other accomplishments.

The Tribe distributed $3 million to Tribal Members and supported Tribal employees during the pandemic. Construction of the education campus began over the summer, as did renovation of additional office space in the Toyon building and expansion at Tyotkas Elder Center.

The Tribe purchased the former Anchor Trailer Court land for future expansion, and saw assets grow to $94 million. The Tribe is debt-free for the second year, though Wilson said that would change as the Tribe will borrow money for the education campus.

Wilson also noted that two Tribal Members are serving as Tribal administration directors – Hendriks, and Dale Segura as TDHE Housing and Facilities Director.

“Things are changing, things are getting better. I’m proud to be a part of it,” Wilson said.

A video recording of the meeting is available to Tribal Members at https://www.kenaitze.org/category/annual2020/.

Chair Wayne D. Wilson Jr. speaks at left as staff from Alaska Universal Productions videotape and broadcast the meeting. The entire meeting is available to Tribal Members on the Tribe’s website.

‘In a time that has been very difficult for all of us, our Tribe has grown and shown a strength to be proud of.’

– Wayne D. Wilson Jr., Chair, Tribal Council

Tribal Member Services promotes Tribal Members’ well-being

Tribal Member Services continues to work to promote the well-being of Kenaitze Tribal Members and their families.

The Tribal Council recently updated several policies that benefit Tribal Members, including the Tribal Member Enrichment Program, burial assistance, and funeral assistance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tribe also has been able to provide financial assistance for Tribal Members.

Tribal Member Enrichment Funds are available to promote the education, health, general welfare, and best interests of Kenaitze Tribal Members.

Adult Tribal Members may apply for up to $1,500 of Tribal Member Enrichment Funds over a rolling 12-month period. Tribal Member Youths may apply for up to $1,000 over a rolling 12-month period.

The Tribal Member Memorial Policy provides guidelines to honor Kenaitze Tribal Members upon notification of their death. Support and resources for flowers, food, and the use of Tyotkas Elder Center may be provided through the use of Tribal Council Discretionary Funds.

The Funeral Assistance Policy provides assistance to Kenaitze Tribal Members to defray the costs of funeral or burial expenses for a deceased family member.

For more information, visit www.kenaitze.org/tribal-members/services or contact Tribal Member Services at 907-335-7200.
TERO Manager working to grow program

As the TERO Manager, Blankenship is building a pool of potential applicants for employment opportunities both with the Tribe and in the community. Building a pool of applicants will allow Blankenship to do two things. First, as job opportunities arise, Blankenship will be able to match qualified candidates with the open positions. “I can help connect people to positions,” Blankenship said.

The application has been kept pretty basic, which Blankenship said is for a reason—so she can reach out to each applicant and talk about their goals and aspirations. “It’s more about empowering people to figure out what they want,” Blankenship said, adding that job applicants have to take the steps themselves, but she can help them along the way.

Second, Blankenship will be able to help candidates in the applicant pool find training and continuing education opportunities to boost their qualifications. Blankenship noted that she’s working on her own college degree. Having benefitted from Tribal grants and scholarships, she is committed to helping others do the same.

Blankenship has been reaching out to TERO managers from other tribes. She said one of the things that she’s learned is that, with a good pool of job candidates, employees outside of the Tribe will reach out, looking for qualified workers.

Blankenship is encouraging participation in the program even for those who may already have a job. By connecting people with training that matches their career goals, people in the applicant pool will be ready when opportunity knocks. “As a Tribe, that’s our mission (to assure Kahtna’ana Den’a’ina thrive forever) by pushing people to bring out their best,” Blankenship said. “...We all have the same goal, to support each other and support the Tribe.”

Learn more about the Tribe’s TERO program and download an application at https://www.kenaitze.org/tribal-member-services/tribal-employment-rights-ordinance/.

In her new role as TERO Manager, Brenda Blankenship is ready to build the program from the ground up. “It’s a great opportunity to grow a program, and build it so that it works for the Tribe,” said Blankenship, a Tribal Member.

The Tribe reinstated the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance about three years ago. The TERO measure provides a way for the Tribe to exercise its sovereignty and give preference to Tribal Members, spouses of Tribal Members, and Alaska Native and American Indian people in employment, contracting and other business activities.

COVID, FROM P. 1

program, the Office of Head Start and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In March, the Tribal Council and administration made the decision to close most of the Tribe’s facilities to the public, including Tytokas Elder Center. To support the Elders who regularly visited Tytokas for lunch, the Elders program began home delivery of hot lunches. The service proved successful and even expanded the program’s reach. On the first day of home delivery, Elders staff prepared 68 meals. By the end of October, Elders staff were preparing 250 meals each day for delivery or pick-up.

Changes at Tytokas Elder Center also are underway. The kitchen is being expanded to accommodate the necessary equipment to continue to prepare to-go meals, while the dining area is being expanded to allow for social distancing when the building reopens to the public.

Renovations are also underway at the Den’ina Wellness Center. Changes in the Primary Care area will allow employees to socially distance while at work, while changes in other parts of the building will allow for services to expand. For example, an expanded lab will allow more types of tests to be completed on-site. Additionally, the new “pandemic suite” will provide additional capabilities to prevent the spread of pathogens.

Primary Care and Behavioral Health staff have been able to use telehealth capabilities to see un’ina, those who come to us, since the onset of the pandemic.

Due to the risks of large gatherings, this year’s Annual General Membership Meeting, held in October, moved online. The event was livestreamed, and voting for Tribal Council Members was completed with mail-in ballots. Gifts were mailed out to Tribal Members, as were the increased number of door prizes.

The Tribe also distributed three rounds of financial relief to Tribal Members to help with COVID-19 and keep employees safe with the spread of pathogens.

Due to the risks of large gatherings, the Tribe’s facilities to the public, including Tytokas Elder Center. To support the Elders who regularly visited Tytokas for lunch, the Elders program began home delivery of hot lunches. The service proved successful and even expanded the program’s reach. On the first day of home delivery, Elders staff prepared 68 meals. By the end of October, Elders staff were preparing 250 meals each day for delivery or pick-up.

Changes at Tytokas Elder Center also are underway. The kitchen is being expanded to accommodate the necessary equipment to continue to prepare to-go meals, while the dining area is being expanded to allow for social distancing when the building reopens to the public.

Renovations are also underway at the Den’ina Wellness Center. Changes in the Primary Care area will allow employees to socially distance while at work, while changes in other parts of the building will allow for services to expand. For example, an expanded lab will allow more types of tests to be completed on-site. Additionally, the new “pandemic suite” will provide additional capabilities to prevent the spread of pathogens.

Primary Care and Behavioral Health staff have been able to use telehealth capabilities to see un’ina, those who come to us, since the onset of the pandemic.

Due to the risks of large gatherings, this year’s Annual General Membership Meeting, held in October, moved online. The event was livestreamed, and voting for Tribal Council Members was completed with mail-in ballots. Gifts were mailed out to Tribal Members, as were the increased number of door prizes.

The Tribe also distributed three rounds of financial relief to Tribal Members to help with the impacts of the pandemic.

Restrictions on gatherings also impacted operations at the Tribe’s educational fishery, which in normal years is a communal effort. This year, fishery employees did almost all of the fishing. On top of that, they processed the fish that came to the net and made arrangements to safely distribute the fish to those who had signed up to fish a tide.

This fall, the Harvest program also acquired a fishing boat to be used for subsistence activities.

Transportation has continued to be an essential service throughout the pandemic. In addition to assisting the Elders program with meal delivery, the Transportation department has continued to assist people who receive services from the Tribe get to and from appointments. The Transportation program also helps people with life activities, such as a trip to the grocery store, and has even served as a courier service, delivering important paperwork.

The Tribe’s Transportation fleet has expanded to meet the increasing need.

The Tribe’s Education programs also are adapting to meet the need. Education staff have launched a blended learning initiative, which combines in-person and online learning. Over the summer, the “Family Lunch Box” pilot program introduced families to distance learning. This fall, the Tribe distributed 150 tablet computers for families to use to access online resources. In December, learners have access to a full schedule of online activities, including Native Youth Olympics, Den’a’ina culture and language, and traditional crafts, to name a few.

The Tribe also has committed to support all of its employees throughout the pandemic, balancing the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and keep employees safe with the needs of those who rely on the Tribe for services. Where appropriate, employees have been working from home.

The Tribe has continued to financially support employees whose positions have been non-essential due to scaling back of services, using extended sick leave pay. Because the Tribe has not been able to host large gatherings, employee appreciation events, such as the summer employee and family picnic and the staff Christmas party, have been replaced with extra paid days off for all staff.
Henu Community Wellness Court celebrates graduate

At left, Jeremy Richardson, Kenaitze Chief Judge Evelyn Huf and Kenai Superior Court Judge Jennifer Wells pose following a ceremony marking Richardson’s graduation from the Henu Community Wellness Court in October.

Richardson was presented with traditional Kenaitze gifts, including a blue bead and a spruce hen feather. The bead is a reminder of how the river flows and to be flexible with life’s challenges. The feather feeds or takes care of blessings. He was also presented with chaga, pictured above, that has been carved out and placed with red beads representing fire. This reflects the past of carrying embers and the future of keeping the fire of sobriety burning.

The Henu Community Wellness Court is a joint-jurisdictional therapeutic court operated by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and Alaska Court Systems serving adults who face legal trouble stemming from substance use.

Tribal Court looking for judges

Kenaitze Tribal Court is seeking additional Tribal Members interested in serving as Tribal Court Judges. Being a Tribal Court Judge requires a heart to serve, compassion, integrity, the ability to maintain confidentiality, and the ability to look at each case objectively while remaining fair and impartial.

Thorough training is provided to all judges and begins with the Kenaitze Indian Tribe’s Court Code. Judges must be willing to travel out of Alaska for continuing education and conferences. Judges receive a stipend.

At a minimum, prospective judges must be Kenaitze Tribal Members; reside in the central Kenai Peninsula area; be at least 31 years old; and pass applicable background requirements.

Interested Tribal Members should contact Chief Judge Evelyn Huf at 335-7216.

Tribe to study internet access

In February 2020, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) presented an opportunity to all Tribes to apply for unused 2.5 GHz broadband spectrum across their Tribal lands. This program is being presented to Tribes as a way to provide internet access to Tribal Members who have no access or have slow or unreliable internet service.

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe’s application and an application filed on behalf of the Ninilchik Traditional Council have been accepted by the FCC and are awaiting approval.

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe is working with the Ninilchik Traditional Council in a joint effort to improve internet accessibility across the service areas of both Tribes.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need and demand for increased Internet access and infrastructure has increased dramatically. The Tribes hope that this opportunity to provide increased broadband spectrum will support Tribal services including but not limited to telemedicine capabilities, distance-learning and other educational services for our Members.

As part of the next step in this process, a joint survey was sent to Kenaitze and Ninilchik Tribal Members living on the Kenai Peninsula between Homer and Cooper Landing. The survey results are anonymous and will be utilized to determine the current physical addresses of the memberships and the current status of internet access and services as part of the needs assessment.

A follow-up survey will be sent to those Members who were not able to reply by the December 8, 2020 deadline. In appreciation for a Member’s participation in the survey, a gift card will be sent to each participating household.

An engineering firm contracted by the Tribe will then use the information obtained through the survey to design a network system with the goal of being capable of providing high speed internet to Tribal Members who live on the Kenai Peninsula. Tribal Members’ participation in this survey is critical in order to ensure that sufficient information is available for planning purposes.

Survey participants are asked to contact Peter McCaslin, Kenaitze IT Director, at 907-335-7646, or via email at pmccaslin@kenaitze.org with further questions.

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: Sasha Jackson
P.O. Box 988
Kenai, AK 99611

Email: sjackson@kenaitze.org Phone: 907-335-7200
Wellness department offers new, online services

A number of Wellness activities are now available online. At-home fitness on demand is being offered to Tribal Members and those who receive services through the Dena’ina Wellness Center.

The program provides workouts via an email invite or a smartphone app. Wellness staff are available to help set the app up. In January, Wellness staff plan to launch a Wellness Wise online group. This group will offer a variety of classes, including nutrition, arts and crafts, fitness tips, salve-making, stress reduction and more.

Wellness also is collaborating with Behavioral Health to start two new groups for men. One group will be geared toward younger men, and the other geared toward older men.

Behavioral Health Native Connections Project Manager Ken Hoyt and Wellness Consultant Levi Sutton are working together to facilitate the groups.

To learn more about Wellness services, call the Dena’ina Wellness Center at 907-335-7500.

LEARN, FROM P. 1

“The goal was to provide a springboard to cook together. We cook as a community,” Gilbert.

Samantha and Rusty Singleton have been participating in the lunchbox learning program with their two oldest daughters, Denali, 8, and Leanna, 3.

Samantha Singleton said she appreciates how the program incorporates lots of subject matter into the lessons. Dena’ina language and culture are central to each learner’s experience.

“I was surprised by all the different aspects of it,” Singleton said. “It was neat that they integrated art into the learning and last time we picked up a box, they taught us a Dena’ina word, which I thought was really cool.”

Each week, as part of the 10-week pilot program, families explored different lunch themes that teach children about huch’ulyeshi, the Dena’ina way of living. Because that way of living was in the outdoors, lunch themes included a hiking lunch, a picnic lunch, and a harvest lunch. Ninety-four families participated in the program. Education program staff created online videos with instructions for preparation and families were also encouraged to innovate with the ingredients provided.

The program gets the whole family involved in the learning process. When it’s safe for children and families to come together for in-person learning, they will be able to build on the concepts they learned together at home.

Participating families reported enjoying the program, and 84 percent said they are preparing more meals as a family.

“We’ve always put their lunch together for them. For them to be able to piece together their own lunches is a real accomplishment. They’ve tried new foods, which is great,” Samantha Singleton said.

Education staff are developing their next distance-delivered Culinary Wellness unit, “Power Snacks.”

As part of the next phase of the Tribe’s blended learning initiative, participating families have received a tablet computer to access Dena’ina culture and language resources. Families will be able to learn to read and write the Dena’ina language together and explore Dena’ina ways of thinking and living.

The tablets have been set up with Behavioral Health to start two new groups for men. One group will be geared toward younger men, and the other geared toward older men.

Behavioral Health Native Connections Project Manager Ken Hoyt and Wellness Consultant Levi Sutton are working together to facilitate the groups.

To learn more about Wellness services, call the Dena’ina Wellness Center at 907-335-7500.

Jonathon Rine, Yaghanen Youth Advocate, is pictured on a computer screen as he teaches a percussion class via the Zoom webinar platform in December. At top right, Emry and Portia Segura drum along.

‘Education doesn’t mean four walls and a desk. Education means learning.’
– Rachel Gilbert, Education Director

Samantha Singleton helps her children Leanna, 3, and Denali, 8, as they work through a lesson in the Education division’s new Family Lunch Box program. The program is an introduction to a new blended learning curriculum the Tribe is introducing to support families in the classroom and at home.

“Education doesn’t mean four walls and a desk. Education means learning,” Gilbert said. “We’re going to think differently about our approach.”
On the road to opportunity

Tribal Member finds new path on RV trip

Sometimes, you need to get out of your comfort zone to find new opportunities.

Maliaq Kairaiuak discovered that for herself when she applied to be a part of Roadtrip Nation.

“Sometimes you get stuck in a certain rhythm in life and you realize you didn’t grow over a period of time,” Kairaiuak said of her experience. “(Roadtrip Nation) really helped in my ability to connect with people, and my drive to connect with people. That was really good for me.”

Kairaiuak’s episode of Roadtrip Nation, “A Single Mom’s Story: Together We Thrive,” recently aired on Alaska Public Media. It can also be streamed at roadtripnation.com/roadtrip/single-mothers.

Roadtrip Nation is “an organization dedicated to helping people find career and life fulfillment,” according to its website. The organization sends groups of people out across the country in its fleet of RVs, stopping for interviews and experiences intended to help them build a career based on their interests.

When Kairaiuak, a Kenaitze Tribal Member, came across a social media ad recruiting single mothers for one of the organization’s trips, she initially thought it was fake. But after doing some research and watching a few of the episodes posted on the organization’s website, roadtripnation.com, she decided to apply.

Kairaiuak said the application process took between two and three months, with several rounds of questions and video interviews. As part of the orientation process, Kairaiuak went to California to meet the families of the two other women who would be on the trip with her, Gabby and Kiera. She said all of their kids got a chance to know each other, which was helpful while she was on the 18-day trip.

The three were heavily involved in planning the trip, doing research to find the fellow single mothers they would interview along the way.

One of the people Kairaiuak picked was Amy Yeung, a Navajo woman and the founder and designer of Orenda Tribe, an upcycled sustainable vintage clothing collection.

“When I was looking for people to interview, all my recommendations were indigenous or minority people. I think it’s really important to find that diversity element,” Kairaiuak said.

The road trip started in Austin, Texas and finished in Los Angeles. Along the way, Kairaiuak said she found her own inspiration. She is now pursuing a film degree at the University of New Mexico.

“I really like helping people share their stories,” Kairaiuak said. Kairaiuak said she was uncomfortable sharing her own story at the beginning of her trip, but became more at ease along the way. She said that if you had asked her five years ago about pursuing a film degree, she would have said “no” and laughed it off.

“Going into the arts is intimidating, but Roadtrip showed me a lot of ways that it could work,” Kairaiuak said.

One challenge she’s facing is being apart from her son, Michael, who is 10. She had originally planned for him to go with her to New Mexico, but because of the uncertainty of starting in a new school during the COVID-19 pandemic, he is staying with Kairaiuak’s mother in Alaska. She almost decided not to go to school because of it, but her family has been supportive.

“They said, ‘We’ll figure out the first year and make it work,’” Kairaiuak said.

She’s hoping to enroll her son in a charter school on the University of New Mexico campus next fall while she finishes her degree. When the spring semester starts up in January, she’ll be a junior.

Kairaiuak will continue to share her story through Roadtrip Nation as a panelist for some virtual presentations, including one for the Aspen Institute’s Ascend 2Gen program, which supports parents of young children who are pursuing degrees, offering both parent-focused and child-focused resources. She also plans to return to Alaska to share her knowledge by providing film and media workshops for Alaska Native youth.

Scholarships, including from the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, have played a big part in her current opportunity. She said that applying for scholarships was a lot of work, but she encourages others in similar situations to look around for opportunities and take a chance on something outside of their comfort zone.

“Embrace it – you never know how big your network can be until you reach out,” she said. “We tend not to be open with our struggles. Going on this trip and talking to other women who have gone through the same thing made me feel less alone.’”

— Maliaq Kairaiuak

‘We tend not to be open with our struggles. Going on this trip and talking to other women who have gone through the same thing made me feel less alone.’

— Maliaq Kairaiuak

Above, Maliaq Kairaiuak, right, a Kenaitze Tribal Member, sits with fellow Roadtrip Nation participants Gabby, left, and Kiera, center, at White Sands National Park in New Mexico, during filming of the show. Kairaiuak’s episode of Roadtrip Nation, “A Single Mom’s Story: Together We Thrive,” can be streamed at roadtripnation.com/roadtrip/single-mothers. Below, Kairaiuak and her son, Michael, pose in front of one of Roadtrip Nation’s original RVs.
Wellness Center remodel underway

In September, the Tribe began a project to remodel portions of the Dena'ina Wellness Center. The planned changes will allow for expansion of services while also providing for social distancing and other safety measures for employees and visitors to the building.

Diana Zirul, Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina Health Board Chair and Tribal Council Treasurer, explained the driving force for the project in video remarks during the Annual General Membership Meeting.

“The Tribal Council has put a lot of effort and time into ensuring that the Dena'ina Wellness Center has been renovated in a manner that will promote the safety, health and well-being of all of our Tribal Members, the Alaska Native and American Indian people who utilize our services in our community, and our Tribal employees,” Zirul said.

On main floor, the Skilak Lake kitchen is being converted into an Optometry suite, with multiple exam rooms and a display area for eyewear.

An expanded break room upstairs will accommodate employee needs, while commercial kitchens at Tyotkas Elder Center and, when completed, the education campus, will meet the needs of various Tribal programs.

The Primary Care department will undergo a major renovation. A few offices will be added, and the furniture in the rest of the space will be reconfigured to allow for social distancing.

A dedicated space will be created for Physical Therapy, as well as complementary medicine – services such as Rolfing and massage therapy.

Radiology, Phlebotomy and the lab will be expanded, and changes will be made to the front desk to create better access for staff and un'ina. A “pandemic suite” will add additional negative pressure rooms that can be sealed off from the rest of the facility to prevent the spread of pathogens. The pandemic suite will have its own entrance.

On the second floor, Classroom 3 will be converted into a food prep area, with pass-through access to Classrooms 2 and 5, providing easier access to serve food at gatherings there. A portion of the Dental area also will be remodeled and expanded.

The project timeline calls for work to be completed in early 2021. Practitioners at the Dena'ina Wellness Center will continue to offer telehealth for most services. Accommodations will be made for un'ina who may need in-person care.

Tyotkas expands services during pandemic

Tyotkas Elder Center has been closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but access to the Tribe’s Elders program has actually expanded and services have evolved to meet community needs.

When the Tribal Council and administration made the decision in March to close facilities, including Tyotkas, to the public, Elders program staff developed a plan to deliver the hot meals so many Elders come to the center to enjoy.

Coby Wilson, a regular at Tyotkas before the pandemic, said he appreciated the option of having hot meals brought to his door, though he misses the social aspect of visiting with friends each day.

“I think all the meals have been delicious, and well-prepared,” Wilson said. “I like to sit at home and get my lunch delivered.”

Many other Elders feel the same way. On March 13, the first day of home delivery, Elders provided 20 meals to-go and delivered 48. Just three weeks later, Elders staff, assisted by employees from other Tribal programs, were delivering 150 meals each day. By the end of October, an average of nearly 250 meals were being provided to Elders each day.

The meals are being supplemented with fresh produce from the Tribe’s Ch’k’denlyah yuyeh Greenhouse. Newsletters and other materials, such as word puzzles, have been included with the home deliveries. The Elders program also provided food box deliveries over the summer. Recently, due to a spike in COVID-19 cases on the central Kenai Peninsula, Tyotkas switched to delivering a weekly food basket to reduce the risk of contact for both Elders and staff members.

While Tyotkas has been closed to the public, a renovation of the center has been underway. The dining area is being expanded to allow visitors to spread out and practice social distancing. A new patio will provide an outdoor gathering space during warmer months. A permanent salad bar will be added, allowing for better cleaning than the portable salad bar.

The renovation will allow the Elders program to continue home delivery of meals after the facility reopens. The kitchen is being expanded to accommodate preparation of meals for home delivery. The Tribe also has purchased a machine that will package meals to-go, as well as new trucks equipped to transport hot and cold food.

For more information about the Elders meal delivery program, call 907-335-7280.

Tribe’s Transportation program keeps rolling

The Tribe’s Transportation program continues to evolve to meet changing needs.

“It’s an ever-changing machine,” said Brandi Bell, the Tribe’s Transportation Coordinator. “We don’t do as much of some things right now, but other areas are exploding.”

For example, the program has always focused on transporting Elders to the Dena’ina Wellness Center for appointments, to Tyotkas Elder Center for lunch and activities, and into town for “essential life activities” such as trips to the grocery store, the bank or to pay bills.

With Tyotkas closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Transportation was tasked with developing routes for home-delivery of meals to Elders. But even with Tyotkas closed, Transportation picked up about 20 new riders from Elders who learned about the service through the meal delivery program.

Bell said that Transportation has also seen an increase in non-Elder transport for essential life activities, as well as for medical appointments at facilities other than the Dena’ina Wellness Center. The program is providing more rides for students at Alaska Christian College, many of whom come from Alaska Native villages.

Drivers also are providing more rides to the Kenai Peninsula Food Bank.

To keep up with the growth, nine new vehicles have been added to the Tribe’s fleet of more than 40 over the past few months.

The new vehicles include three shuttle buses, two trucks to support the Tribe’s fishery operations, and two hot-and-cold food delivery trucks for Elders meal home delivery.

Bell said the Tribe had been progressing toward the shuttle buses and food delivery trucks, but the need to adapt services during the pandemic and available federal COVID-19 relief funding accelerated the process.

The Tribe’s fleet of vehicles now includes:

- Minivans, used by individual programs;
- 5-passenger Ford Transit vans, used primarily by the Yaghanen Youth Program and Behavioral Health Youth Services;
- SUVs, used by individual programs or assigned to visiting health care practitioners or contractors;
- Trucks, for Maintenance, Housing, Facilities and the fishery; and
- Shuttle buses. Bell said the shuttle buses are nice because they’re much easier to drive.
‘On the right trajectory’

Journey provides reason to quit tobacco

For Ken Hoyt, one journey has inspired another. Early this year, Hoyt, who is Tlingit, was asked by his tribe to participate in a canoe voyage as part of Celebration, one of the largest gatherings of Southeast Alaska Native people. Hoyt said he realized that he wasn’t in any shape to do a week-long canoe trip, and enlisted the help of Wellness staff at the Dena’ina Wellness Center to quit vaping and improve his fitness.

“When I was going to meet with Levi to quit smoking, and Michael in the gym to get fit,” said Hoyt, referring to Wellness Consultant Levi Sutton and Personal Trainer Michael Domanon.

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the increased risk for those who smoke or vape added additional urgency to his decision to quit. “It turned into, ‘I should quit smoking because of the virus.’ Now, I really have to quit,” Hoyt said. Sutton, who is a state-certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist, said that if you’re thinking about it, now is a good time to quit smoking.

“I want to help people right now. If people are ready to quit, reach out and get started on a plan. We’ll get you on your path to a healthier life,” Sutton said.

Sutton said people who smoke or use e-cigarettes are at greater risk from COVID-19 due to the health of their lungs, as well as other factors, such as frequently touching their face while smoking.

There are two paths to receiving tobacco cessation services through the Wellness department at the Dena’ina Wellness Center. Many un’ina, those who come to us for services, are referred to the program by their health care provider.

When he receives a notification, Sutton reaches out to see how he can help. Some un’ina may be ready to come up with a plan to quit on the spot, others may need to think about it for a few more days, or a couple of weeks, or even longer. “Everyone has their own journey, their own way of quitting,” Sutton said.

Those who are registered to receive services through the Dena’ina Wellness Center may also call Sutton directly to start their quit plan. He’s available by phone at 907-231-5925 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

For those who are not eligible for services through the Dena’ina Wellness Center, Sutton recommends calling Alaska’s Tobacco Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT NOW, or 1-800-784-8669. Information also is available at alaskaquitline.com. Once he gets a call, Sutton will run through a questionnaire with an un’ina, and help to develop a plan to quit from there. That often includes nicotine replacement therapy, using nicotine gum or lozenges in conjunction with a counselor’s support. Sutton will share the plan with an un’ina’s health care provider to approve any medications.

Hoyt, who is 33, said he had smoked for 10 years, and vaped for three years. Working with the Wellness staff, he has been using nicotine replacement therapy. He said it has helped to alleviate what he called “nic fits” – nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms he had when he tried to quit cold turkey in the past.

“You’re replacing one thing with another. Hopefully, you replace bad things with good things,” Hoyt said.

Sutton said that the best way to quit is with the support of a counselor and an FDA-regulated nicotine replacement therapy, such as the lozenges which have been working for Hoyt.

“About a month after quitting, Hoyt said he started to really notice his lungs clearing out. Cravings also started easing up. The pandemic moved this year’s Celebration gathering online, but Hoyt says he’s sticking with his commitment to quit. He said he relapsed recently, using e-cigarettes after his grandmother passed away. But even that, he said, is part of the journey – most people take several attempts to quit, and he sees himself as further along than he was just a few months ago.

“It’s OK to mess up, as long as you stay on the right trajectory,” Hoyt said, adding that he had set a new quit date for himself.

Hoyt said that even with the replacement therapy, quitting is still hard work.

“It’s not like you take a pill and wake up and you’re well,” Hoyt said. “We help out any way we can,” Bell said. Drivers are following health and safety guidelines, including wearing gloves and masks. Passengers are asked to wear a mask if they’re able.

Drivers also are spending extra time cleaning. Vehicles are sanitized after every ride – even if it’s the same rider getting back in for a return trip. Transportation also has a new steam cleaning machine, so vehicles will receive a regular detailing.

The Transportation program covers a large swath of territory, from Halibut Road in Nikiski to Scout Lake Road in Sterling, and Pollard Loop in Kasilof. For Transportation service, call Brandi Bell at 907-335-7212.
Making connections

There are many facets to suicide prevention. It could mean getting someone off the street and into safe housing. Or it could mean locking up a gun. Whatever it means to keep someone safe – it all falls under suicide prevention.

“The goal is to partner with people, and to help people partner with each other,” said Ken Hoyt, a Project Coordinator in the Tribe’s Behavioral Health department.

Hoyt is working on the Native Connections grant, which supports reducing suicidal behavior and substance use among Alaska Native and American Indian youth up to age 24; easing the impacts of substance use, mental illness and trauma in tribal communities; and supporting youth as they transition into adulthood.

“You can accomplish a lot when you team up, making sure the logistical partnerships are made, and then making those innovative partnerships,” Hoyt said.

One area on which Hoyt is focusing is identifying gaps in services, and looking for innovative ways to address those gaps. For example, he sees a gap for young adults who are right around high school graduation age. If they don’t have plans for after they graduate, they have the potential to feel isolated.

“That’s a tough time for a lot of young people, especially young men, and especially Native young men,” Hoyt said.

Hoyt also is focused on providing training to increase the community’s awareness and alert level with regard to suicide. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is a two-day intervention training, while QPR Gatekeeper and SafeTALK are half-day trainings that help participants learn to recognize warning signs.

Hoyt said he is looking at opportunities to “indigenize” trainings offered by the Tribe. For example, there are parts of the ASIST training that lend themselves to being presented as a talking circle.

With current COVID-19 concerns, Hoyt is looking for opportunities for online awareness training as well.

LivingWorks Start training (https://www.livingworks.net/start) is a one-hour, online training. Anyone interested in taking the training should email Hoyt at khoyt@dena'ina.org.

Careline Alaska, a “suicide prevention and someone to talk to line,” also is being promoted. Careline Alaska is available to call any time at 1-877-266-4357. More information can be found at carelinealaska.com.

Hoyt plans to provide awareness training to the community as frequently as possible.

Another area of focus is “means reduction” – removing methods available to someone contemplating self-harm. That includes locking up firearms and medications. Last spring, Hoyt distributed gun locks at the Dena’ina Wellness Center health fair, and is looking for other opportunities to make the community safer.

“Long term, the real goal to pursue is community connectedness,” Hoyt said. “Risk factors can turn into protective factors if you can have a strong, connected community!”

Connectedness is an important part of Alaska Native culture, Hoyt said.

“That’s traditional culture for Alaska,” Hoyt said.

“For example, a potlatch involves taking time to recognize our interdependency and interconnectedness. ... Indigenous culture is about healing.”

‘Indigenous culture is about healing.’
– Ken Hoyt, Native Connections Project Manager

As the season closes at the Tribe’s educational fishery, the Harvest program continues with fall moose hunts.

This year, the Tribe received three bull moose permits. By November, three moose had come to the Tribe, and Harvest Program Supervisor Jake Kooly was able to fill the permits.

Kooly noted that hunting in areas where he’s hunted in the past, including Spirit Lake near Kenai and Swanson River Road near Sterling, had been challenging. He said he saw several wolf-killed moose, and wondered if that might have scared other moose away.

Once the moose that come to the Tribe are processed, the meat will be distributed to Elders. Kooly said the moose meat is like the king salmon that come to the Tribe’s net – it isn’t enough to fill everyone’s freezer, but it is enough to give everyone a taste of a traditional food.

The Tribe is taking advantage of a new fishing opportunity with the acquisition of a 32-foot fishing boat to support subsistence activities. The vessel will be kept in Homer for the winter. Two fishing trips in November resulted in nine king salmon coming to the Tribe to be distributed to Elders.

Tribal Harvest program changes with the seasons

Behavioral Health moves into Chuq’eya Qenq’a space

In September, the Dena’ina Wellness Center’s Behavioral Health program moved into Chuq’eya Qenq’a, or Birch Tree House.

Chuq’eya Qenq’a is located just across the driveway from the main doors of the Dena’ina Wellness Center. The building previously housed Na’ina Family and Social Services. The building has been remodeled throughout to accommodate Behavioral Health department needs.

The new space has a number of features that will enhance the services that Behavioral Health staff provide. Among them is an expanded playroom area to provide therapy services for children. The building also features larger, more private offices – with large windows – for clinicians working with uni’ina.

A double rainbow forms last fall above Birch Tree House, the location for the Tribe’s Behavioral Health division.
Cooking with Kenaitze
Celebrate the season with flavorful recipes

Moose Meat, Gravy and Rice

1 pound moose meat
1 teaspoon garlic powder
Salt to taste
Pepper to taste
3 to 4 cups water
¼ cup soy sauce
1 bunch broccoli
½ bunch cauliflower
1 small can mushrooms
4 tablespoons cornstarch or flour
½ cup water

Cut meat into bite size pieces and brown in large fry pan. Add salt, pepper, garlic powder. When meat is well done and brown, add water and soy sauce, bring to a boil, let simmer for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Cut vegetables into bite size pieces and add to meat. Let simmer for 15 minutes. Mix cornstarch into ½ cup water. Mix very well and add to meat, and vegetables, stirring constantly until desired thickness. Cook for about 5 minutes or until gravy is done. Serve over steamed rice.

This recipe is from the “Traditional Food Guide for the Alaska Native People,” published by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. The guide contains nutritional information and preparation tips for wild Alaskan meats, fish, seafood and plants that are part of our Alaska Native cultures across the state. To order a copy, email cancer@anthc.org.

Spruce Tip Shortbread

1½ cups flour
¼ cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ cup brown sugar
¼ cup ground cinnamon
½ cup butter, softened
¼ cup fresh spruce tips
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup sugar
ści

In a food processor, process the sugar and spruce tips until the tips are finely chopped. Add the flour and process in bursts to mix well. Cut butter into half-inch chunks, add to the processor, and process until butter is evenly distributed and the dough hold together when pinched. Roll out with a lightly floured rolling pin until the rectangle is 6-by-8 inches. Cut the rectangle into 1-inch crosswise strips and in half length-wise to form 16 1-by-3-inch cookies. Prick each cookie 5 times with tines of a fork. Place on a parchment lined baking sheet. Bake for 23-26 minutes at 300 degrees until they begin to turn golden brown (not browned).

Recipe by Sharon Isaak.

Rose Hip Christmas Truffles

Makes around 15-20 truffles. Rose hips provide a nice boost of Vitamin C.

¼ cup fresh spruce tips
¼ cup flour
½ cup butter
Salt to taste

In a food processor, process the nuts in a food processor until finely chopped. Add the flour and process in bursts to mix well. Cut butter into half-inch chunks, add to the processor, and process until butter is evenly distributed and the dough hold together when pinched. Roll out with a lightly floured rolling pin until the rectangle is 6-by-8 inches. Cut the rectangle into 1-inch crosswise strips and in half length-wise to form 16 1-by-3-inch cookies. Prick each cookie 5 times with tines of a fork. Place on a parchment lined baking sheet. Bake for 23-26 minutes at 300 degrees until they begin to turn golden brown (not browned).

Recipe reprinted with permission from thechiclife.com.

Rose Hip Christmas Truffles

3½ ounces raw cashew nuts
3½ ounces dried unsulfured apricots
2 tablespoons extra virgin coconut oil, room temperature
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon vanilla extract or ground vanilla
tablespoon ground cayenne
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Rolling mixture:
1 tablespoon cacao powder
1 tablespoon rose hip powder

Start by mixing the nuts in a food processor until finely chopped (be careful not to run them to long). Then add the rest of the ingredients and pulse for about 1 minute or until it forms up like a ball. Remove the knife blades from the food processor.

Place the mixture in the fridge for about 10 minutes. Then form 15 to 20 small round truffles with your hands; they should be half the size of a golf ball. Roll the truffles in the rolling mixture and place in the fridge for 20 minutes before serving.

Roasted Beet Hummus

Ingredients
2 large beets
1 can chickpeas (keep the water)
Juice of one lemon
2-3 garlic cloves
3 tablespoons tahini
1-2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt, more if needed

Directions
Pre-heat oven to 400 degrees. Wash beets, wrap them in foil and roast for 40-50 minutes.

Add the drained chickpeas, garlic cloves, tahini, olive oil, salt, lemon juice to food processor. Once beets are baked, unwrap and dice them, then add to food processor.

Puree until the beets are completely chopped up and blend into the hummus. Taste. If too sweet add more salt or lemon juice, or more tahini/oil for creamier texture. Serve with veggies, pita bread, or crackers.

Above, meat, such as moose, served with vegetables over steamed rice can be a hearty, healthy winter meal. Below, Spruce Top Shortbread is a seasonal favorite.
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
  855-335-8865 fax

- **Early Childhood Center**
  130 N. Willow St., Kenai, AK 99601
  907-335-7260

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

- **Yaghanen Youth Program, Education and Career Development**
  35105 K-B Dr., Soldotna, AK 99669
  907-335-7290

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

- **Na’ini Family and Social Services**
  1001 Mission Ave., Kenai, AK 99611
  907-335-7600

- **Tribal Court**
  508 Upland St., Kenai, AK 99611
  907-335-7219

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