Tribe signs historic compact

Kenaitze Indian Tribe, State of Alaska sign historic child welfare agreement

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe has signed an agreement with the State of Alaska that establishes a framework for the tribe to provide additional child welfare programs across its service area on behalf of the Alaska Office of Children’s Services.

Kenaitze was among 18 Alaska tribes and tribal organizations that signed the agreement during the 2017 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in Anchorage, the largest annual gathering of Native peoples in the United States.

Under the agreement, called the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact, the tribe will provide child welfare services that would otherwise be provided by the Alaska Office of Children’s Services. The compact gives the tribe greater local control and oversight of family services while incorporating the values, culture and traditions of its people.

It is the first agreement of its kind.

See WELFARE AGREEMENT, p.3

Tribe hosts annual meeting

Four incumbent candidates re-elected to Tribal Council

With four Tribal Council seats up for grabs at the Annual General Membership Meeting in October, incumbent candidates carried the day.

Tribal members re-elected Wayne Wilson, Clinton Lageson, Liisia Blizzard and Bernadine Atchison to the seven-member Tribal Council. Each will serve two-year terms. They join Jennifer Showalter Yeoman, James O. Segura and Diana Zirul, whose positions were not up for election.

Lageson received 89 votes, Wilson 88, Blizzard 86 and Atchison 83. Also on the ballot were Elsie Maillelle (62), Audre Gifford (61), Doug Boling (48), Bonnie Julussen Gibbs (42) René Edelman Azzara (40), Emerline Showalter (36) and Paul Lorenzo (34).

After the meeting, held at the Dena’ina Wellness Center, the Council elected its officers as follows:
- Wayne Wilson, Chairperson
- Bernadine Atchison, Vice-Chairperson
- Clinton Lageson, Treasurer
- Diana Zirul, Secretary

See ANNUAL MEETING, p. 5

Clare Swan, at right, reaches to cast her ballot at the Annual General Membership Meeting as Council member James O. Segura points the way.
NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Yaghali du!
It’s been a month … two council meetings, an annual meeting, the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, and a slew of employee and director work groups. In between, I have met many tribal members, new acquaintances and old friends. All the while discovering how the organization works. What I have found are caring, capable people at every turn. To be sure, we can use some alignment of our near term goals and we need to lay out a plan to achieve those further down the path, but the Mission and Vision of the tribe remain focused to assure that Kahtnuh’tana Dena’ina thrive forever.

Each area of the tribe is doing their part. The Tribal Council has spent the last few months reviewing the process for amending the tribe’s Constitution and updating fundamental ordinances and tribe-wide policies. This preparation will allow the Council to focus on long term goals – solicitations have been sent out for proposals or qualifications related to a strategic plan, a permanent tribal fishery, and the next round of planning for expanded tribal program facilities. Tribal Council committees are gearing up for new members in the coming year and developing recommendations for the Council on a tribal conservation district, improved and expanded options for enrollment services and Elder care.

One of the most vital initiatives is a recent directive by the Council to work cooperatively with the Kenaitze Tribal Court and tribal members to establish an independent judicial review board that would oversee the recruitment, review and recommendation of judicial candidates to the Council for appointment. The Council also tasked the Court Code Committee and administration to develop a process to address tribal member requests for information and complaints when the immunity of the tribe might otherwise prevent access to a court.

Program directors and staff are busy updating reporting dashboards, laying out a plan to improve leadership skills and communications as well as preparing for Dena’ina Wellness Center reaccreditations in the new year. All this effort, together with new hires and on-going training, seek to increase and improve tribal member services and experiences at the Dena’ina Wellness Center.

We are celebrating the strides the tribe has made in the recent Tribal Child Welfare Compact and an evolving concept on education. These agreements acknowledge the rightful place of the tribe in promoting the welfare and everyday lives of our members. They offer a multitude of possibilities as well as pitfalls. We are confident that they will, in the end, assure that our People thrive forever.

Bart Garber
Executive Director

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 and like us on Facebook at facebook.com/kenaitze.

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

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: Jessica Crump
P.O. Box 988
Kenai, AK 99611
jcrump@kenaitze.org
907-335-7204

Kenaitze Tribal Court Chief Judge Kim Sweet speaks during the signing ceremony. Judge Sweet was one of three co-negotiators who worked eight months with negotiators with the State of Alaska to put together the historic agreement.

WELFARE AGREEMENT, from p. 1

kind in the U.S.

“This moment has been a long time in the making,” said Kimberley Sweet, Chief Judge for the Kenaitze Tribal Court and a co-lead negotiator on the project. “We as tribal caucus are dedicated to moving forward with an open heart, with the knowledge that this historical government-to-government agreement will provide healing for our children and our communities.”

The tribe will sign a Service and Support Funding Agreement by Dec. 15, outlining the specific programs it will deliver and who will be eligible to receive those services. The state will manage the contract similar to the way other contracts and grantees are administered. The state will be the tribe as part of the agreement.

Alaska Gov. Bill Walker attended the signing and praised participating tribes and tribal organizations for working together to better the lives of children across the state.

“I just want to say that I am so proud of what has been accomplished,” Walker said.

“It’s a recipe of what more we can do, so let’s begin with this and celebrate this and let’s look for other ways we can use the same concept to make Alaska a better Alaska.”

Studies show that Alaska Native children have been disproportionately represented in the state’s foster system for many years.

According to the Alaska Federation of Natives, 22 percent of the state’s children are Alaska Native yet Alaska Native children account for 37 percent of the foster population. Additionally, 29 percent of Alaska Native children in foster care are placed in non-Native, non-relative families. A shortage of licensed Alaska Native foster homes compounds the issue.

Project leaders believe the new agreement will help keep Alaska Native children in their communities, which is important to health and happiness.

“We recognize today that Alaska Native culture keeps Alaska Native kids safe,” said Valerie Davidson, Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.
Meet the Tribal Council

Bernadine Atchison and her husband James have three sons, three daughters, 10 grandchildren and another granddaughter on the way. Her mother is Virginia Hunter, Nulchina (Sky or North Star Clan). Her father Jerome Atchison is from Michigan. Her grandmother was Rika Murphy, Nulchina (Sky or North Star Clan). Her great-grandmother Eva Hunter (Backoff), Fishtail Clan, is from Kustatan.

She has served on the Council from 1985 to 1987, and was elected again in 2015. She was reelected to a two-year term in October and is the Tribal Council-Vice-Chairperson. Atchison graduated from Kenai Central High School in 1976. She has pursued opportunities for continuing education, earning a Certificate of Training from the Indian Action Program for Clerical Training, and certifications in Medical Office Coding, Claims Processing, and Terminology. She also earned certifications in Medical-Secretarial School at Michigan. She has attended trainings for tribal court judges and Court Appointed Special Advocates, and studies the Den’ina language at Kenai Peninsula College.

She studied at the U. S. Forest Service’s National Award for Excellence “Windows on the Past” for work at K’Beq’ Interpretive Site and Susten Camp. She is a former program coordinator and director of RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), overseeing 800+ volunteers. She served as the coordinator for the Alaska statewide event “Peace and Dignity Journeys 1992,” a relay run starting in Anchorage at one end and Argentina at the other end with runners meeting in Mexico City to commemorate 500 years of heroic survival of Native People and an alternative way to promote physical and mental health recreation.

She was appointed in 1990 to the Indigenous Alaska Human Rights Tribunal to research the experimental Hepatitis B immunization that was being conducted on Alaskan Native people and other minority groups. The blood-based vaccine was purposed to immunize against Hepatitis B, but had a deleterious and fatal effect on some people by triggering the development of the AIDS virus. Due to research for the tribunal and others included on the front page of this issue of the Counting Cord, Atchison has been a Community Emergency Response Team member since February 2015.

Atchison wrote that she wants to make a difference and use her work experience to serve tribal citizens and the tribe as a sovereign government. “I want to contribute to our growth and strengthen our self-governance through self-determination,” she wrote. “I want to continue to build on what our tribe has accomplished to make a better future for our children, grandchildren, and future generations in jobs, cultural/language preservation, protecting our environment, subsistence rights, and Native knowledge.”

Belonging to the tribe “means I know who I am and I respect myself and all human beings. It means we all have a path to walk and each of ours is different but just as important in contributing to our environment and world. It means I follow our Traditional Values and use them as a guide to keep me on the high road and know that what I say or do will impact our tribe and future generations. Being a tribal member means I have an obligation to follow our Traditional Values and to ensure that our culture and human rights are in place for future generations.”

In her spare time she enjoys beading, jewelry making, sewing, crafts with grandchildren, fusing glass, flower gardening, agate hunting, beach combing and reading.

Liisia K. Blizzard and her husband William have four children and eight grandchildren. Her parents were Alexander and Georgia Johansen. Blizzard has served on the Tribal Council since 2011. She was reelected to a two-year term in October and is the Council Secretary. She studied at the Medical-Secretarial School at Al Careers Inc. in Tacoma, Wash. She has also attended trainings for tribal court judges and Court Appointed Special Advocates, and studies the Den’ina language at Kenai Peninsula College.

She is a member of Cook Inlet Region Inc. and Kenai Natives Association Inc. “I worked for the tribe during the early years and also for the tribe in different capacities.” She works to ensure Kahtnuht’ana Dena’ina thrive forever.

Sincerely,

Wayne Wilson Jr.
Tribal Council Chairperson
of developing programs, establishing financial stability and the critical need for health, dental, health and behavioral health programs and services for our tribal members,” she wrote. “I am committed to ensuring that our children and future generations have access to good education, learn to speak the Dena’ina language, how they are and know their cultural and traditional ways of living. I believe that the journey of knowing who you are may be the key to finding a solution to drug and alcohol addiction, suicide and generational trauma. I advocate for the reunification of our families who have been separated due to addiction and other interrelated issues facing our people.”

“I am proud to be a member of Kenaitze Indian Tribe. The tribe is my family. The drumming and the songs are healing to me. My father instilled pride in my heritage and taught me the Denaina Way of Living. It is important to me that our tribal people flourish, are healthy and productive.”

In her spare time, she enjoys fishing, berry picking, winter sports, arts and camping and jelly making and cooking.

Clinton Ray Lageson was born in Anchorage in 1984. He and his wife Jessica are raising two sons. Ryder is 9 and Rylynd is 4. Lageson has served on the Tribal Council since 2015. He was reelected to a two-year term in October and has been the Council’s Executive Officer/Secretary since 2017. He has vocational education in cooking, pipe welding and oil spill response. He has journeyman experience in iron work, structural welding, and carpentry. He has worked with business and construction management. He wants to pursue a degree in business administration.

He serves on the Kenaitze/Salmonatof Tribally Designated Housing Entity and Tribal Council and was recently designated the National Congress of American Indians Alaska area alternate Vice President. He represents the tribe on Cook Inlet Regional Council. He has served on the Tribal Council since 1999 to 2001, from 2006 to 2013 and was elected to Council again in 2015. He is reelected in October to a two-year term.

Wilson graduated from Kenai Central High School in 1990. He has a Small Business degree from Kenai Peninsula College, and has accumulated at least 60 additional credits in various subjects. He has an Equipment Operator School certificate and an American Diesel Automotive College Certificate. He is a lifetime Cook Inlet commercial drift fisherman and has worked as an equipment operator, in asbestos removal and owned Zippy Janitorial from 2004 to 2012.

His professional affiliations include Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Kenai Native Association Inc. and Kahtnuht’ana Development Corporation.

Wilson has volunteered at Boys & Girls club, Kids Scouts, the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and at the Boys & Girls club, Girls Scouts, Anchorage Division of Health and Human Services, for ANHI and on the Board of Directors for Frontier Community Services.

Showalter Yeoman volunteers at the Boys & Girls club, Girls Scouts, the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District and at the Boys & Girls club. She is a foster parent through the Office of Children’s Services, a member of the National Association of Social Workers, and belongs to the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce and the Kenai Chamber of Commerce.

“Ever since I can remember, participating in tribal activities were an important part of our family,” she wrote. “I remember my dad working hard for the Tribal Council and his biggest achievement was getting the tribal fishery and waterfront. As a college student I became extremely interested in my culture and ended up with a degree in anthropology as a result of it. Through that process I knew that I would eventually want to be a leader for my people. Since that time I have been and look forward to continue serving. I enjoy serving our people and making decisions that can have a positive impact on others.”

“My interest in serving on the Council is to ensure that the programs and services provided by the tribe are both fair and equitable to all tribal members, and that policies and processes are in place to make this happen,” Zirul wrote. “I firmly believe that the best interest of the tribe must be sustained and that the rights of all tribal members must be protected, and view my roll on the Council as a means to ensure that their voices are heard during the Council’s decision-making process.”

“Through my parents Leona and Alan Blohm and my grandparents Pauline and Clarence March, I gained an appreciation for my Alaska Native heritage and culture. Each of these individuals instilled in me the desire to devote as much as I could about our history and encouraged me to pass this knowledge on to others to ensure that our heritage and culture are not forgotten. I enjoy spending time with my Elders and the youth to share in our stories, heritage and culture, and strive to represent this as I serve on the Council.”

Diana L. Zirul is married to James Zirul. Her mother is Leona Blohm and she has three siblings: Lori Nelkie, Patti Satkowiak and Kevin Blohm. She was elected to a two-year term on the Tribal Council in October. She currently serves as the Tribal Council Secretary. She chairs the Health Committee, Court Code Committee, and the Policy, Ordinance and Procedures Committee.

Zirul has a Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management from Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich. She also has a Master of Public Administration from the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor. She is the Practice Administrator at Peninsula Ear, Nose & Throat Clinic Inc. in Kenai and owns Clinical Management Consulting Services.

Zirul is certified as a Registered Health Information Administrator by the American Health Information Managers Association and belongs to the Alaska Health Information Managers Association.

She is the Vice President of the Board of Directors for Kenai Native Associations Inc. and serves on the Board of Directors for the Kenai Peninsula United Way. She is a past President of the Central Peninsula Hospital Board of Directors.

In her spare time, she enjoys camping and fishing. She also enjoys smoking and canning fish.

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Tribe hires new Executive Director

‘It is a real privilege to return home and work for Kenaitze’

Bart Garber, an experienced business leader and legal professional with lifelong ties to the Alaska Native community, has been hired as Executive Director of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. Garber joined the tribe in September, replacing Jaylene Peterson-Nyren, who served as Executive Director for eight years.

“It is a real privilege to return home and work for Kenaitze, the largest tribe in the region,” Garber said. “I can’t imagine a better opportunity to use my experience and skills to promote and carry out the tribe’s mission and vision,” Garber said.

Garber has spent the past two decades in business management, executive leadership, and tribal and commercial law positions. His management experience includes stints as Chief Executive Officer of Tyonek Native Corporation and as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Toghotthele Corporation based in Nenana. In law, Garber has worked as a staff attorney with the Native American Rights Fund and private practices in Anchorage and Fairbanks, representing tribal governments, Native corporations and organizations. He also served on an array of boards and committees across Alaska and the United States. Garber earned a Juris Doctorate degree from the National Law Center at George Washington University and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Oregon. He completed undergraduate work at the University of Oregon.

Garber, who was born in Anchorage and is a member of the Native Village of Tyonek, has spent summers commercial fishing with uncles on Three Mile Beach north of the Chuit River. His grandmother was born in Kenai. In his free time, Garber – a Tebughna – enjoys the beach, boats and the water. He is excited to be living in the Kenai area.

“Fear front to forward meeting our employees and tribal members and keeping in touch on a regular basis,” Garber said.

Tribe seeks committee, commission members

Are you interested in getting more involved with the tribe? The tribe is accepting applications for vacancies on tribal committees and commissions. These groups help inform and guide decision made by the Tribal Council. Committee and commission members receive meeting stipends. For an application or more information, contact the Tribal Government Office at 907-335-7200.

Kenaitze Indian Tribe Committees and Commissions

- Finance Committee
- Constitution Committee
- Court Code Committee
- Education Committee
- Elders Committee
- Election Board
- TERO Commission
- Enrollment Committee
- Health Committee
- Hunting, Fishing and Gathering Commission
- Land Committee
- Traditional Healing Committee
- Policy, Ordinances and Procedures Committee
- Kenaitze/Salamatof Tribally Designated Housing Entity
- Kenaitze Early Childhood Center/Head Start Policy Council
Conference promotes ‘That which grows medicine’

Did you know that the vitamin-rich northern yarrow plant, translated to “bask’il’uts’i” in the Dena’ina language, can be used in tea to treat colds and fevers? Or that the stinging nettle, “qilch’exa,” can be used to treat allergies? What about that Kenai birch, “beluta kenaica,” can alleviate headaches and stomach pain?

Those were just a few of the lessons shared during the 2017 Dena’ina Plants as Food and Medicine Conference in September. The tribe hosted the two-day event to promote traditional plant knowledge and the ethical use of plants as food and medicine. More than 100 people attended.

“It was a beautiful opportunity to learn together,” said Deb Nyquist, the tribe’s Director of Wellness.

The event featured a mix of panel discussions, presentations and demonstrations led by Dena’ina culture and language bearers, tribal Elders and plant medicine experts. Participants were treated to foods made from wild plants, including birch shortbread, and sipped medicinal teas between learning sessions. Facts sheets were distributed featuring tea recipes, medical information and the history of numerous plants important to the Dena’ina people.

There were panel discussions on traditional Dena’ina lifestyles in the 21st century, the future of the Dena’ina people, and ethical land use. Panel members included Kenaitze employees, tribal members, Elders, and special guests. During the land use discussion, Matt Bowser of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service discussed wild harvesting opportunities in the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. He overviewed rules and regulations relating to harvesting wild plants in the refuge, and offered examples of edible plants available for harvest in the refuge.

Bowser emphasized education and sustainability.

“‘A lot of good things are happening,’” Bowser said.

Additional highlights included a yarrow salve-making demonstration, and presentations on botanical approaches to diabetes and safe plant preservation techniques.

There also was a presentation co-hosted by author Priscilla Russell and Dena’ina language expert Helen Dick.

Russell, an ethnobotanist, has spent much of her life documenting and sharing Alaska Native traditions. She published Tanaina Plantlore, a study of Dena’ina Athabascan ethnobotany, as well as numerous other works. Dick is a fluent Dena’ina speaker who has been instrumental in promoting and preserve the language, teaching courses at Kenai Peninsula College, the Alaska Native Language Center and Alaska Native Heritage Center.

The duo discussed life in rural Alaska and the many ways plants are incorporated into nutrition and healing. Russell shared a slide show of photos she took during her travels to villages across the state.

Dick, who was born near Lime Village, fielded questions about her experiences and plant knowledge. Speaking softly, the Elder offered a piece of advice: “Teach the kids and be good to other people,” she said.

Chiqinik, thank you

The tribe offers a chiqinik, thank you, to those who supported the event, including The CIRI Foundation, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and Alaska Humanities Forum.
Cooking with Kenaitze: Harvest Season

For thousands of years, Dena’ina people have hunted and gathered food across Yaghanen, the good land. From moose to salmon to wild berries, food harvested from the land is important to Dena’ina life. Cooking with Kenaitze highlights ingredients and recipes relevant to Dena’ina culture. This time we focus on dishes to serve with foods that have been canned at home.

Many different foods can be preserved with proper canning.

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<td>6 hot cooked vegetables of your choice</td>
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<td>1 can cream soup</td>
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<td>1 cup milk</td>
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<td>¼ pound grated cheese</td>
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**Directions**

Cook macaroni according to package directions. Drain. Mix macaroni with cream soup and milk in a casserole dish. Stir in cut-up canned meat and grated cheese. Bake at 350 degrees until bubbly (about 15 minutes). Serve hot.

Place vegetables and meat in a large pot with enough water, meat juice or vegetable juice to cover. Boil at least 10 minutes. Thicken with flour mixed with cold water or milk. Add leftover gravy if available. Season to taste. Serve hot.

Cook onion and celery in fat. Add meat and tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper. Combine mixture with cooked macaroni in a casserole dish. Top with grated cheese, or bread crumbs if desired. Bake for 15 minutes at 350 degrees. Serve hot.

Boil meat in salted water until tender. Drain. Place meat, potatoes and carrots in a 4-quart saucepan. Combine flour in water. After the water mixture boils for at least ten minutes, add the flour and water mixture and cook until thickened. Season to taste.

Submit your favorite recipe. Have a recipe to share? Email it to M. Scott Moon at smoon@kenaitze.org.
A guide to Purchased and Referred Care

Purchased and Referred Care is a benefit to eligible un’ina, those who come to us, that provides funding for referred or emergency health services provided by non-tribal medical providers and facilities. However, it is not an entitlement or insurance program. Eligibility requirements apply. The Dena’ina Wellness Center is happy to answer questions and assist un’ina through the Purchased and Referred Care process.

Contacts:
Craig Culver, 907-335-7574 cculver@kenaitze.org
Tracey Hedlund-Smith, 907-335-7537 or thedlund-smith@kenaitze.org

What qualifies as an emergency?
Purchased and Referred Care defines an emergency as any medical condition for which immediate medical attention is necessary to prevent the death or serious impairment of an individual’s health. Examples include, among others:

- Heart attack
- Poisoning
- Gunshot wound
- Severe burn
- Head injury/concussion

For non-emergencies, if the Dena’ina Wellness Center is open and available to provide the needed care, Purchased and Referred Care will not pay for services rendered elsewhere. For care that does not require immediate medical attention to prevent death or serious impairment when the Dena’ina Wellness Center is open and available to provide needed care, Purchased and Referred Care will not pay for services rendered in Central Peninsula Hospital’s emergency department.

Who is eligible?
Purchased and Referred Care has a number of eligibility requirements. The program is open to:

- Alaska Native and American Indian people
- Non-Native or American Indian women pregnant with an eligible person’s child
- Children of an eligible person, including foster children, adopted children, stepchildren, legal wards or orphans, up to the age of 19
- Alaska residents who have lived in the state for 180 days and reside in the tribe’s service delivery area with intent to stay indefinitely, and who use the Dena’ina Wellness Center as their primary care provider
- Those who meet notification requirements
- Those who meet alternate resource requirements

What if I’m traveling in Alaska?
If you fall ill or get injured while traveling, Purchased and Referred Care can cover the costs of your treatment under certain circumstances. Generally, travelers must meet the following requirements to be eligible:

- Establish proof of Alaska residency
- Utilize an Indian Health Care facility when available
- Have a Certificate of Indian Blood or tribal enrollment card on file
- Report any emergency medical treatment to the Dena’ina Wellness Center within 72 hours

What if I’m traveling outside Alaska?
If you require care outside Alaska, the Alaska Native Medical Center Purchased and Referred Care Program can cover your treatment under certain circumstances. In addition to meeting the requirements for in-state travel, travelers also must:

- Report any emergency medical treatment to the Alaska Native Medical Center within 72 hours at 1-800-478-1636
- Provide medical records of out-of-state travel within 30 days
- Pay for medical services upfront if traveling outside the United States Students attending school outside Alaska may be eligible for Purchased and Referred Care. Please contact the Alaska Native Medical Center Purchased and Referred Care at 800-478-1636 for more information.

What is an alternate resource?
An alternate resource is insurance that may cover medical expenses. If available, these resources are used before Purchased and Referred Care to pay for treatment. Additionally, you may be asked to be screened for alternate resource eligibility before Purchased and Referred Care will cover your treatment. Not getting screened for alternate resources can lead to denial of Purchased and Referred Care reimbursement. These resources include:

- Medicare A and B
- Alaska Medicaid
- Private insurance
- Workers’ compensation
- Auto insurance
- Homeowner’s insurance
- Veterans Administration

Dena’ina Wellness Center announces twice-monthly afternoon openings

Beginning Nov. 8, the Dena’ina Wellness Center will open at 1 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month. The morning closures will be used for staff planning, building maintenance and other administrative duties. The center will continue to operate at regular hours all other times. Please contact the center at 907-335-7500 for additional information.

Insurance enrollment underway

The Dena’ina Wellness Center is offering open enrollment for the Tribally-Sponsored Health Insurance Program (T-SHIP) through Dec. 15. The program provides medical insurance at no cost to eligible Alaska Native and American Indian people. Recipients must be Alaska residents, be eligible for Indian Health Services, and meet income guidelines, among other requirements. To enroll, visit the Dena’ina Wellness Center in person or contact Joan Shepard at 907-335-7562 or Annette Schultz at 907-335-7563

The tribe is currently accepting volunteers for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. The program offers free tax-preparation service to Alaska Native and American Indian people by IRS-certified volunteers at the tribe’s administrative office in Kenai. For more information, contact DeeDee Fowler at 335-7622 or dfowler@kenaitze.org.

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Flu Season Is Here,
Be Prepared and get a shot!

To schedule an appointment Call 335-7500
A labor of love, and tradition
Tribe hosts moosehide tanning workshop

With the hide stretched toward the edges of a wood frame, rope pulling it taut, Joel Isaak grabbed a piece of slate. He knelt down, on top of the canvas, and began scraping the flat rock back and forth with both hands.

“Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh. What we’re trying to do is squeegee out the water,” Isaak said.

This fall, Isaak led a traditional moosehide tanning workshop at the Dena’ina Wellness Center. The tribe hosted the event in partnership with the Smithsonian Institute’s Arctic Studies Center and the Anchorage Museum. A Smithsonian curator documented the event, which was open to the public. The aim was to promote Dena’ina tradition, culture and language.

Isaak, a tribal member, has spent the past year working as a consultant on the tribe’s Dena’ina Language and Culture Revitalization Project. For the workshop, participants took the hide of a recently skinned moose and went through the labor-intensive process of preparing it for use as traditional regalia or other clothing.

The effort began in September and culminated in late October. When it was ready, the hide was transported from Kenai to Anchorage for use in an artist residency hosted by the Smithsonian.

To start the process, Isaak and a small team spent consecutive days scraping flesh and fur off the fresh hide. They used an array of tools and periodically rinsed the hide in a large tub of water. The goal was to rid the hide—which Isaak estimated weighed about 100 pounds at the time—of all hair and flesh.

A few weeks later, Isaak preserved the hide by freezing it—the team returned to work.

Isaak, two language apprentices and two conservators from the Anchorage Museum spent a week stretching and squeegeeing water out of the hide. They tied the hide to a wood frame that laid on the ground and push out water using tools made of slate, wood and bone.

Late on the fourth day of scraping, after the group had worked both the flesh and fur sides of the hide, Isaak said it was almost ready for the smoker. The hide would go into a cold smoke, a process that can take days.

“You have to keep a close eye on it,” Isaak said. At this stage, Isaak estimated the hide weighed 25 or 30 pounds—significantly less than when the team received it. Although the team poked a few holes in the hide, Isaak was happy with it.

“Will see what it looks like in the morning,” he said. “The hide looks a lot less stretchy now and that’s a good sign for the dryness. Once the hide stops stretching, you want to get it off the frame.”

The Smithsonian curator who attended, Dawn Biddison, said the Smithsonian would create learning resources from material gathered during the workshop. The materials will include instructional videos and classroom curriculum, which will be available at no charge to Alaska heritage organizations, schools, libraries, artists, and others.

Biddison said she hopes the project helps generate interest around Dena’ina traditions.

“When you see a finished piece, it’s just the tip of the iceberg,” Biddison said. “It’s the harvesting, the processing of materials. It’s a lot of work, a lot of cultural knowledge learned over generations and passed over hundreds of years.”
Gloria Wik and Diane Roach concentrate on their circuit training as Michael Dotomain, a personal trainer at the Dena’ina Wellness Center, monitors their progress in the center’s activity area.

A dynamic duo

Workout partners combine fun and fitness to achieve health goals

Workout partners combine fun and fitness to achieve health goals

The last time Diane Roach visited the heart doctor, a formal stress test revealed glowing results — better than any the doctor had seen for someone her age. The last time Gloria Wik stepped on a scale, the numbers revealed glowing results — forty pounds lighter.

Roach, 73, and Wik, 71, are workout partners at the Dena’ina Wellness Center activities area. They visit the gym a few times a week, every week, to participate in fitness classes and work with the tribe’s personal trainers.

They attribute their health success to the support and services they receive at the center. And, even if it comes with a little ribbing, they both appreciate having a workout pal who is willing to hold them accountable.

“She calls me a lazy bum when I don’t show up,” Roach said.

A lazy bum?

“Well, yeah, and she is. She stays up too late and watches movies, and then she doesn’t want to come and work out,” Wik said.

It’s all in good nature, of course, because to Roach and Wik the social aspect of exercising is as appealing as the health component.

The duo met and started training together nearly two years ago.

Wik had been coming to the gym a couple times a week, off and on, before Roach began showing up. They often walked next to each other on their own treadmills.

“She always wore ear buds,” Roach said. “But I made her take them off.”

Soon they noticed Michael Dotomain, one of the tribe’s personal trainers, working with others on individualized workouts. They approached him, asking if he would be willing to work with them, too.

“And he graciously took us under his big wing,” Roach said.

Fast forward to August, almost two years later, and Roach and Wik are close friends and regulars in the gym. Both have enjoyed significant health benefits thanks to their time with Dotomain and other staff members.

For Roach, who is Yupik, the exercise has improved her balance and endurance. She feels better on the days she works out and has no problem keeping up with her golden retriever on brisk walks around the neighborhood.

The stress test at the heart doctor’s office validated her hard work.

“Thanks to these guys here, I had the best test in the whole system for a 73-year-old,” she said.

Meanwhile, Wik, a tribal member, also has made great progress.

She began coming to the gym when she was enrolled in the tribe’s diabetes prevention program. The program helped her make healthy diet changes, and when she began working out with Roach and the fitness staff, her progress only quickened.

Down 40 pounds, even her children are amazed.

“I can kick their butts on many levels,” Wik said.

But their workouts aren’t all fun and games.

Roach dreads an exercise called “superwoman,” where she lies flat on her back and points both her legs and arms toward the ceiling, holding the position. For a time, she also struggled with walls sits. Wik loathes a few exercises as well, especially the “grasshopper” and “mountain climber.”

But from a personal trainer’s perspective, the ladies are the perfect clients. They work hard, have a good attitude and support each other.

“We all want to be just like them when we’re in our 70s,” Dotomain said.

Roach and Wik attribute their success to Dotomain and the tribe’s other personal trainers — Levi Sutton and Kristi Lighfoot. They appreciate how the trainers shape workouts to meet their needs and that no two workouts are the same.

Above all, Roach and Wik feel supported each time they walk through the door.

“I think they really want us to succeed. That comes across,” Roach said. “It’s not like, ‘Oh, god, here they come.’

Neither Roach nor Wik plan on stopping anytime soon.

And they hope others are encouraged by their story.

“Come and join the fun,” Wik said.
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

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855-335-8865 fax

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

Tyotkas Elder 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
1106 Mission Ave., Kenai, AK 99611
907-398-7933

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
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