

# The Counting Cord

## Nitnuqeyishi



January–February 2018

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE NEWSLETTER

## Native Youth Olympics returns to Kenai

Event runs from Jan. 26 to 28; Native Pride Dancers performance also scheduled

The tribe's Yaghanen Youth Program will host the 2018 Native Youth Olympics Invitational Jan. 26 to 28 at Kenai Middle School. The event is part of the annual Peninsula Winter Games.

The invitational attracts athletes from across Alaska who compete in traditional athletic events. This year's schedule includes everything from the seal hop to the kneel jump to the one-foot high kick, and more. Athletes will compete in junior and senior divisions.

Event organizers place a strong emphasis on sportsmanship, so fans and athletes alike can expect a friendly, supportive environment.

Those looking for entertainment beyond the competition can watch a special performance by the Native Pride Dancers. The performance, a fundraiser for Yaghanen, is scheduled for 7 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 27, at Kenai Central High School. Tickets cost \$15.

The Native Pride Dancers are based in Minnesota and perform across the world. The group incorporates traditional regalia, music, singing and dancing.

Native Pride tickets will be available at the door and can be purchased ahead of time at the tribe's administration office, which is located at 150 N. Willow St. in Kenai. For more information, please contact Yaghanen at 907-335-7290.



Eli Darien shows his dog Violet some love during a walk near their home in north Kenai. Violet has been a close companion to Darien during both good times and bad. Below, during a Henu' Community Wellness Court session, Darien laughs with fellow participants after his musical Christmas sweater interrupted a conversation.

## 'I'm here for a reason'

After four decades of drug use, a tribal member discovers sobriety



*Blood was seeping into the man's brain and he was high on cocaine. The white powder, which he had snorted, was deep in his system when the aneurysm ruptured. He heard the pop, felt the pop, an excruciating pain. But he could not go to the doctor. Not with drugs in his system. Not if it meant jail time. So he waited, aching. Three days later, bedridden and crying in a dark room, the man confided in his wife. "I need to see a doctor," he said. Then he stood up, felt the world tilt, collapsed and vomited. He was rushed to the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage and almost immediately flown to a Seattle hospital, where he slipped into a coma.*

Today, two decades later, Eli Darien is 55 years old and enrolled in the Henu' Community Wellness Court. The court, which opened about a year ago in Kenai, is operated in partnership between the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and Alaska Court System.

Henu' serves people who face legal trouble stemming from substance use, taking a restorative

approach toward healing. It serves people who struggle with drugs and alcohol, who want sobriety, but who are shackled by addiction.

With the nation facing an opioid epidemic, and countless communities searching for solutions, this is the story of one man's revival and his tribe's effort to save him.

See **I'M HERE**, p. 4



# NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Happy New Year.

I hope 2017 was a good year for you and that you have a happy, healthy year ahead. The tribe’s fiscal new year starts in October, so we’ve been spending time planning – both strategically for the future and operationally for the present. I do want to pause here to take a moment to remember some of last year’s accomplishments.

Hopefully, by now you’ve made an appointment with our new optometrist at the Dena’ina Wellness Center. Optometry is the latest of a number of new health services the tribe has added at the center since its construction.

We’ve launched a new program aimed at reducing suicide rates across the community. The Yinihugheltani Program – meaning “one’s spirit” – operates within the Behavioral Health Department at the Dena’ina Wellness Center. It is funded by a five-year grant from the Center for Substance Abuse



Bart Garber

Prevention and focuses on awareness and prevention.

The tribe hosted the Dena’ina Plants as Food and Medicine Conference last fall. The event promoted traditional plant knowledge, ethical harvesting and more. A new greenhouse has been built on our Old Town Kenai campus. We will use it nearly year-round to grow plants and the ideas taught in the conference.

Three of our Yaghanen Youth Program camps are now accredited by the Kenai Peninsula School District and we’re working to accredit more. This means high school students can get credit for attending our camps.

Our joint-jurisdiction Henu’ Community Wellness Court became operational. Eli Darien, one of the tribe’s Elders, is on track to be One of the first to graduate from the program. I hope you’ll read his story on the front of this issue.

Last fall we 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. We’re still negotiating terms with the state and will give you another update soon.

We added a family visitation room to Na’ini Social Services, giving the tribe a warm and supportive place for people served by the Family Services Program.

The Alaska Head Start Association recognized the tribe with a pair of 2017 Awards of Excellence. The tribe also won four awards for communications from the Public Relations Society of America’s Alaska chapter.

Fiscal Year 2018 started on quick pace. A new Executive Director and newly elected Tribal Council were getting to know each other while carrying on the business of the Tribe. Sometimes the things that keep us the busiest are the least visible. The whole staff has been engaged with a process that will lead to the reaccreditation of our Behavioral Health department by mid-year 2018. Administration has been in continuous communications with Indian health Service managers and legal counsel to determine important long-term grant reimbursement policies under our Compact. Executive officers and the Council have been setting the course on significant new tribal governance initiatives regarding tribal fisheries, education, and regional transportation project and cultural mitigation plans.

We are looking forward to a productive and joyful year. We wish the best for you and your family in the New Year. Thank you ahead of time for your participation and support.

*Bart Garber*  
Bart Garber  
Executive Director

# Do you know these people? Help us update their Tribal Government Office address

If your name is on this list, the post office has returned mail we have tried to send. Please call Jessica Crump at 907-335-7204 or email her at [jcrump@kenaitze.org](mailto:jcrump@kenaitze.org) so that we can update your records.

- |                        |                       |                         |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Astad, Sonya           | Frostad, Katheryn     | Munson, Karina          |
| Baker, Corey           | Fulton-Guest, Theresa | Murphy, Brandi          |
| Baty, Maximillian      | Gardner, Amber        | Norbett, Michael        |
| Bayes, Chantilly       | Geiser, Tanner        | Pappe, Seth             |
| Bennett, Cheryl        | Gesh, Elijah          | Paxton, Christian       |
| Blatchford, Joel       | Graham, Justin        | Paxton, Dawn            |
| Bocatch, Claude        | Grothe, Cameron       | Paxton, Devan           |
| Bock, Salty            | Grothe, Garrett       | Phillip, Bessie         |
| Boling, Autumn         | Hallstead Jr, Keith   | Pomeroy, Jenna          |
| Boulette, Camryn       | Hallstead, Jesse      | Richardson, Miles       |
| Brandon, Rhianna       | Hallstead, Kathleen   | Richardson-Card, Autumn |
| Branson, Erica         | Handsaker, Amber      | Robinson, Darick        |
| Brian, Breanna         | Harker, Solari        | Ross, Jolene            |
| Brown, James           | Hartnett, Danielle    | Rouse, James            |
| Brunni, Rebecca        | Hawley, Emily         | Sacaloff, Jon           |
| Brunni, Richard        | Hawley, Preston       | Sanders, James          |
| Busane, Manual         | Hawley, Sentilla      | Scaggs, James           |
| Busane, Mariano        | Huf, Jessica          | Scott, Sarah            |
| Byron, Margaret        | Huf, Natasha          | Seibert, Carol          |
| Callender, Christopher | Huf, Taylor           | Seibert, Michael        |
| Cameron, Victoria      | III Hermansen, Martin | Sloan, Lori             |
| Carlough, Michael      | Ivanoff, Raymond      | Smagge, James           |
| Carlough, Simon        | Johansen, Andrew      | Smith Jr, Bobby         |
| Chaffin, Marie         | Johnson, Austin       | Smith, Elisha           |
| Chaffin, Tina          | Johnson, Brandon      | Smith, Erica            |
| Costanios, Hazel       | Johnson, Ryan         | Smith, Landis           |
| Coveyou, Sarah         | Johnson, Ryan         | Smith, Shannon          |
| Cross Jr, James        | Johnson, Sarah        | Stockwell, George       |
| Cross, James           | Juliussen, George     | Stratton, Ruby          |
| Culhane, Sharon        | Juliussen, Samuel     | Stratton, Ruby          |
| Cunningham, Megan      | Juliussen, Winter     | Stroman, David          |
| Darien, Edward         | Ketah, Elizabeth      | Sutherland, Matthew     |
| Darien-Hileman, Lisa   | Kilgore, Benjirmen    | Swan, Corey             |
| Dean, Clifford         | Kilgore, Seth         | Swan, Joshua            |
| Dean, Clifford         | Kingman, Norma        | Tanner, Emma            |
| Dean, Lisa             | Landt, Jamie          | Taylor, Jeffery         |
| Deitz, Tracy           | Lewis, Ryan           | Tibbs, Donald           |
| Depweg, Jessica        | Lorenzo, Anthony      | Tilley, Crystal         |
| Dexter, Elsie          | Lyse, Erik            | Tonnema, Barbara        |
| Dolchok, Clifford      | Mahle Jr, Gerald      | Tweedy, Courtney        |
| Edelman, Drasanna      | Mahle Sr, Gerald      | Webb, Megan             |
| Edelman, Jay           | Maupin, Nadine        | Wessel, Valeria         |
| Edwards, Courtney      | McCurdy, Shawn        | Wheeler, Norma          |
| Engelstad, David       | McIrvin, Zackary      | Wik, Jordan             |
| England, Patricia      | Miller, Melody        | Wilson, Rachel          |
| Faucett, Daniel        | Miller, Mikayla       | Wolf, Joshua            |
| Forstner, Ashley       | Miller, Natasha       | Wright, Heidi           |
| Frost, Ashley          | Mueller, Richard      | Wright-Nelson, Alyssa   |
| Frost, Gabrielle       | Munson, Joni          | Zajac, Devin            |

## Correction

In the November – December issue, Diana L. Zirul’s service on Tribal Council was incorrect. She has served since October 2016. We apologize for the error.

## 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](mailto:jcrump@kenaitze.org)  
907-335-7204

## From the editor’s desk

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

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

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





# NOTE FROM THE COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

Hello,  
Happy New Year to our tribal citizens and to the many people the tribe serves. I hope the year ahead treats you well.

Your Council is hard at work setting a direction for the tribe's future. We're working on a strategic plan. We're representing the tribe's interests in the Sterling Highway Bypass Project. We are also close to an agreement with the State of Alaska regarding new childrens' welfare services we will soon provide. The agreement is a result of the historic compact we signed last fall.

The Council is working on new relationships and growing old ones, as well. I'd like to welcome a new person, welcome back two others with years of previous service, and congratulate an Elder who has enriched the tribe and the lives of many.

Flora Olrún will be helping many of you in her new role as Tribal Member Services Administrator. You can read more about Flora on p. 3. We are looking forward to the contributions she will make.



Wayne Wilson Jr.

Mary Ann Mills and Susan Wells have recently been sworn in as tribal judges. From Tribal Court, they will build on many years of service they have already brought to the tribe. Judge Wells is serving as interim Chief Judge while Chief Judge Kimberley Sweet is out on leave.

I'd like to congratulate tribal Elder Clare Swan for 17 years of service as the Chairperson of the Board for Cook Inlet Tribal Council. She stepped down from the chair position in December, but remains on the board, where she's served more than two decades.

If you are looking for a place to serve, one place to start is on one of the tribe's committees. You can learn more about the committees on our website and can apply by sending a letter of interest to Sasha Jackson, either at our administration building or at [sjackson@kenaitze.org](mailto:sjackson@kenaitze.org).

Sincerely,

*Wayne Wilson, Jr.*

Wayne Wilson Jr.  
Tribal Council Chairperson

# TRIBAL COUNCIL



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# Flora Olrún joins Tribal Government Office

Flora Olrún, an experienced tribal government professional, has been hired as tribal member services administrator. Olrún will manage the Tribal Government Office and serve as a primary point of contact for tribal members. She began the job Jan. 2.

"I'm really excited to learn about the people here," said Olrún, who is Athabascan and Yupik.

Olrún's tribal government experience includes stints at the Orutsararmiut Native Council and Ugashik Traditional Council. She also worked at the State of Alaska and has experience in the non-profit sector, having worked at Southcentral Foundation,



Flora Olrún is the new Tribal Member Services Administrator. Access Alaska and the Association of Village Council Presidents. She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Alaska

Fairbanks. The Tribal Government Office manages the Educational Fishery, Tribal Harvest Program, enrollment and records, and other tribal member services. Olrún hopes to make both immediate and long-term improvements "I enjoy the reports and regular kind of stuff, but the biggest value is the difference tribes can make for their own people," Olrún said.

In her free time, Olrún enjoys fishing, gardening and spending time with family. Her mother is from Shageluk and her father is from Nunapitchuk.

Olrún can be reached at 907-335-7200.

# Tax-preparation assistance available

The tribe will start accepting appointments on Feb. 1 for those interested in utilizing the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. The program offers free tax-preparation service to Alaska Native and American Indian people who qualify for tribal services and earn an annual income of less than \$60,000.

The service is being offered by IRS-certified volunteers at the tribe's administrative offices at 150 N. Willow St. To schedule an

appointment, contact DeeDee Fowler at 335-7622 or Sara Dennis at 335-7625.

Please bring the following documents to your appointment:

- Proof of Indian blood
- Forms: W-2, 1099 and 1098
- Social Security Cards or ITIN letters for you and anyone else on your tax return
- Picture Identification (such as a valid driver's license or other government-issued ID) of you and your spouse, if applicable

- Copy of your 2016 tax return
  - Any other tax forms you received for 2017.
- Volunteers cannot assist with businesses with inventory, employees or depreciation (so no fishing boat or permit owners), no state tax returns, no alternative minimum tax, no fuel tax credit, no NOL's (Net Operating Losses).
- Volunteer tax preparers are also needed. Training is provided online.





Kenai Superior Court Judge Anna Moran and Kenaitze Tribal Court Judge Rusty Swan, both seated at right, meet with Darien, at left, and other participants during a Henu' Community Wellness Court session in the Kenaitze courtroom. Unlike state court, where judges sit above and separate, Henu' judges sit with participants.

I'M HERE, from p. 1

## A lifetime of drugs

Darien grew up in Old Town Kenai on the same land that today houses the Dena'ina Wellness Center.

He began using drugs at the age of 14. First it was marijuana, then speed, and others.

By adulthood, although he worked a union job as a tile layer, Darien was trying every drug put in front of him.

"There isn't a drug I've tried I didn't like," he said. "I liked it all."

Legal, financial and health troubles followed.

Court records show misdemeanor convictions for an array of crimes – property damage, drunken on premises, driving without a license – in the mid-1980s and early 90s. Then came formal evictions from his residences in the late-90s.

The brain aneurysm occurred in 1997, when Darien was in his mid-30s, a near-death experience he attributes to cocaine use. He suffered a stroke and was in a coma for nearly a month due to the aneurysm, which leaked blood onto his brain.

Doctors snipped two aneurysms during an operation but left behind a third because touching it would cause permanent brain damage.

Darien's care team said he defied odds by surviving. Darien said the pain was so intense, he wasn't sure

he even wanted to survive.

"I never thought I wanted to burn to death until that happened," he said.

Soon after returning home, despite the health scare, Darien returned to drugs.

And in 2002, his wife Beth died



Darien, a Kenaitze Elder, is in Phase 3 of 4 of the Henu' program and is on track to graduate this year.

at the age of 43. The loss triggered a downward spiral.

Darien remembers little from the two years that followed – "I was high the whole time" – and his legal issues mounted. Reckless endangerment, assault, failure to

appear in court, violating conditions of release – an endless circle of drugs and jail, court records show.

But even worse was the pain Darien's addiction inflicted on his loved ones.

Shortly after Beth died, Darien remembers his stepdaughter coming to his home to help clean. A bundle of syringes fell from his shirt as she tried to fold it. She told him she would not return, or allow her children to visit, unless he got clean.

He didn't.

The spiral intensified when Darien met a new woman after Beth's death. At first it was a good relationship – he thought she was the one, he said – but it deteriorated.

Together they did more drugs than Darien had his entire life. She was an alcoholic, he said, and they shared methamphetamine and heroin.

And even when they discussed quitting, Darien did not want to give up meth.

"I told her, are you out of your mind?" he said. "I finally found a dope I'd sell my soul for and you want me to quit now? No way."

The situation worsened over the years. Darien's teeth began to fall out. Relationships with loved ones eroded.

Then he was charged with possession of a controlled substance in 2012 and again in 2014, Class C felonies, according to court re-

cords. There were other charges, too, including assault and theft.

In 2016, in the throw of addiction and a heap of legal troubles, Darien suffered a heart attack.

That same year, Darien remembers a night when the temperature dropped to nearly 30-below zero on the Kenai Peninsula. Living alone in a camper with walls less than 2 inches thick, he ran out of propane. The temperature dropped inside the camper, and he had nowhere to go. A Coast Guard-approved survival suit, what a commercial fisherman would strap on when a vessel sinks, saved his life.

"I put that on and went to bed. Prayed for the best," Darien said. "Luckily I woke up the next morning."

## A community problem

During the grand-opening celebration for the Henu' court last year, the tribe's Chief Judge, Kim Sweet, shared the Dena'ina story of "Nant'ina," an evil figure who creeps into villages under the cover of fog and inflicts evil and pain on those in its path.

Today, Sweet said, Nant'ina, is in the community in the form of drugs and alcohol.

"The appearance of our land has changed – roads, malls, asphalt and concrete," Sweet said. "Nant'ina has changed too. No longer an outcast, he is found in our homes, the places we go for companionship, our family gatherings."





Darien and his dog Violet start a long walk from their home in north Kenai. Darien has been working to repair damage and neglect to the residence that occurred during his years of drug and alcohol abuse.

The numbers tell a difficult story, in Alaska and beyond. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nationwide opioid overdose rates more than doubled among youth ages 15 to 19 between 1999 and 2007. After a decline, the numbers again spiked in 2015. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a 283 percent increase in opioid overdoses between 2001 and 2013. And the 2016 Alaska Statewide Drug Report showed increases in treatment admissions, arrests and drug seizures relating to opioids across the state.

Darien, entrenched for a lifetime, appreciates the problem as well as anyone.

“It’s huge,” he said. “People get out of jail, it’s a never-ending circle. It’s really hard unless you’re ready to say goodbye to those people who are stoned.”

Carol McMormick, a probation officer with Henu’, said one of the key issues is a lack of resources.

Most addicts, she said, simply do not have access to the support they need to get and stay clean.

“People who have been active in addiction for several years, they go to jail and get sober and come out, and they are not only struggling with sobriety but everything else.”

Henu’ aims to break that cycle.

### A different court model

Henu’ is modeled on joint-jurisdiction courts in California

and Minnesota that have reported success since opening.

Two judges sit beside each other during cases. One judge represents the tribe. The other represents the state.

It is a post-plea, pre-sentencing court, meaning offenders plead guilty to charges but receive delayed sentencing while they are enrolled in the program. Those who graduate receive favorable outcomes.

The court consists of four phases – orientation and assessment, education and planning, skill development and feedback, and maintenance and transition. It takes about 18 months to complete. Participants must be at least 18 years old.

Those who enter develop a “Life Change Plan” addressing everything from their criminal influences, to their values and beliefs, to their personality, to their family, and more.

They also receive behavioral health counseling, transportation assistance and access to other resources to help them get reestablished in the community.

“Instead of punitive, it’s restorative,” Sweet said.

But the court also is rigorous. Participants are assigned a probation officer. There are random urine analysis tests, home visits, weekly court hearings, and more.

“There are a lot of rules,” Darien said.

Currently, seven people are

enrolled. The program capacity is 20.

During court hearings, participants sit beside each other and update the judges on their progress. Judges ask about highlights and challenges, offer encouragement, and discuss expectations for each participant.

Kenai Superior Court Judge Anna Moran, who represents the state, sees the success of participants as a success for the community.

“This is a chance for us to join together and bring wellness to our community,” she said.

### Enjoying sobriety

Darien has been sober since March 8, 2017, his longest stretch of sobriety in four decades.

When he enrolled in Henu’, he said people doubted he could complete the program. He doesn’t blame them.

“Most of the people were telling me this would be really tough because I had screwed up so many times,” Darien said. “Once I decided I was going to quit, it was different this time. It was easy.”

The strict requirements keep him accountable, and peer support gives him hope and motivation.

Darien is in Phase 3 of 4 of the program and is on track to graduate this year. There is much work still to do, but he is enjoying a life free of drugs.

He often eats lunch at the Tyotkas Elder Center, which is walking distance from court. He helped mend nets at the tribal fishery last

summer. He attended the tribe’s Elders Christmas party in December, and watched a nephew’s holiday concert at Kenai Central High School. With permission from the court, he hopes to attend a granddaughter’s high school graduation in Oregon this summer.

A cabin Darien started building years ago but never finished is beginning to take shape, beginning to feel like home. And for the first time in a long time, he is building healthy relationships.

“The clean friends I’ve got, they are just amazing,” he said. “The friends I had while I was using, you always had to watch your back, keep an eye on all your stuff. My friends I’ve got now I’d trust them with my life, with anything I have.”

Darien hopes to one day become a drug and alcohol counselor.

He wants to help others, give back.

“I’m here for a reason,” he said.

“I’ve got to be.”

### Henu’ Community Wellness Court

To contact the court, call 907-335-7219. The court is currently accepting applications and encourages those interested to apply. The court is located next to the Dena’ina Wellness Center in Old Town Kenai.



# Putting a face to the homeless



Eunice Ruhl talks about her experience living as a squatter in an abandoned cabin near Kenai, surrounded by her belongings. The cabin has no electricity or running water. She has improvised a woodstove for heat and built an outhouse nearby.

## Tribe offers support services, but resources are limited amid strong demand

Barehanded, breath visible, Eunice Ruhl knelt down, brushed snow off the log and propped it upright. With a grunt, she slung an ax over her shoulder and thrust it toward the ground.

The blade thumped into the wood, which crumbled into chunks the size of charcoal briquettes.

“Pretty rotten,” Ruhl said, catching her breath, “but it will do.”

To stay warm that night, it would have to do.

Ruhl is homeless and living on the central Kenai Peninsula, the tribe’s service area, a region known for its natural beauty and world-class outdoor recreation. But there are people living in vehicles, tents and dilapidated structures. And unlike larger cities, where homeless people and business professionals share downtown sidewalks each day, the issue is hidden in rural areas such as Kenai. The tribe offers support services, but resources are limited amid strong demand.

“The homeless aren’t in the streets sleeping. You’re not going to see them,” said December Shugak, who works in the tribe’s Na’ini Social Services Program. “They are in the woods, the trees, the beach,

and that’s why so many people think we don’t have a homeless problem here. We do.”

Ruhl, 63, lives alone in an abandoned shack down a side road miles from town. The plot of land is cluttered with scrap metal, rusted vehicles and falling-down outbuildings. Coyotes howl at night, she says, and vehicles zoom up and down the nearby highway. Kota, a long-haired Chihuahua dog, is the only company she keeps.

Ruhl has been living in the rickety structure for about five months, working to make it habitable. She found a wood stove at the local dump and built a chimney from scrap metal to keep the place warm. Plastic windows, also from the dump, help with insulation. Blankets line the ceiling, rugs cover the floor, and there is a bed in a corner of the one-room structure. There is no doorknob on the front entrance, only a swinging door.

There have been no unwanted visitors, not yet, but Ruhl worries about drug use in the area.

Who might show up?

“I’m making it,” she said.

Ruhl, who is from the village of Ugashik in southwest Alaska,



Ruhl, 63, swings a splitting maul to make firewood for her woodstove. Squatting on the land, she uses the cabin behind her for shelter and the shed to the left for trash previous users left on the property.

began struggling after her husband died in 2014. The couple had been living in the village, where he worked at a power plant and she ran trap lines and made arts and crafts.

But the cost of living was high, and it was too expensive to stay on her own.

So Ruhl, who identified herself as Eskimo and Aleut, moved to the Kenai area to be closer to family.

She assumed a seasonal lease on an apartment, but the situation fell through and she couldn’t find another place to live. She came to the tribe’s Na’ini Social Services Program seeking assistance.

The tribe gave her a two-man tent and a gas stove. Then Ruhl discovered the abandoned property. She decided it was her best option.

“I just couldn’t make it

anymore,” she said.

Because the property is located miles outside town, and Ruhl does not own a vehicle or possess a driver’s license, transportation is a problem. A roundtrip cab fare costs about \$30.

Social services professionals agree that transportation is a barrier for those in need. Public transportation is limited.

The Central Area Rural Transit System offers low-cost rides, but only on weekdays. A new bus line runs from Ninilchik to Soldotna to Kenai, but only three days a week, and it does not reach the outlying communities of Sterling and Nikiski. The tribe offers transportation, but riders must meet eligibility requirements.

That the Kenai Peninsula is about the size of West Virginia



only compounds the issue.

“Transportation here is probably our No. 1 issue,” said Elizabeth Kleweno, a social services specialist with the tribe. “It is the biggest issue and the costliest.”

Ruhl, who receives about \$1,000 a month from her husband’s pension, believes she could get a job if she had reliable transportation. She enjoys manual labor and says she has applied for positions stocking shelves.

But without a steady way to reach town, it’s difficult to get hired.

“I want to work,” she said. “I like to work.”

The pension money, Ruhl says, is not enough to cover necessities in addition to rent. Medical costs, transportation, food and incidentals swallow her budget.

For people on a fixed income, or with no income at all, it can be difficult to obtain affordable housing.

Although the tribe and other local agencies offer subsidized housing, which reduces the cost of rent on a sliding scale based on a person’s income, local options are limited. The application process also can be a barrier for those with criminal backgrounds.

One of 32 units in the tribe’s Toyon Villa Apartments in Old Town Kenai is designated for transitional housing, offering free rent. Sonja Barbaza, the tribe’s housing representative, said there is about a 10-person waitlist for the unit. Four other units in the complex are subsidized by the tribe. Barbaza said the waitlist for those units is about 20.

The tribe also works closely with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to offer subsidized housing. Barbaza encourages those who come to her to apply for the program. If accepted, they can live in the tribe’s apartments or units managed by other landlords at subsidized rates.

But a criminal background check is part of the application, which leads to denials. Some people, Barbaza said, don’t even bother applying.

It’s a challenging dynamic. “Homelessness is what causes the violent crimes and all those things in the first place because they aren’t having their basic needs met,” Barbaza said.

It is not known how many people are homeless in the area.

Cheryl Carattini, another social services specialist with the tribe, said local nonprofit Love Inc. served more than 300 homeless people in 2017. Project Homeless Connect, an annual event where local organizations offer support and resources to those in need, has grown since its inception six years ago. And about half the people

served through the tribe’s General Assistance Program, which provides essential needs, are homeless.

“It’s talked about but I don’t think it’s actually known how bad it is here, how serious it is here,” Carattini said.

Shelters in the area provide some relief.

The Friendship Mission, a faith-based shelter in Kenai, serves men. The Freedom House in Soldotna, also faith-based, serves women. Then there is the LeeShore Center in Kenai, housing women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. There also is Indigo Recovery Housing in Kenai, providing transitional housing.

Those places cover some of the need, but not all of it, said Kleweno.

Another challenge is paperwork.

Many of the tribe’s services are funded by grants that require demographic and other information about program recipients. If a

recipient doesn’t have the required documentation, the process is slowed and it’s difficult for the tribe to help.

One man, who goes by the name Two Wolf, lives alone in a tent in

Kenai. The tribe has helped him with everything from food to emergency lodging to warm clothing.

But it took about a month for the tribe to complete a required income verification, said Roberta Turner, the tribe’s social services program administrator. A

challenge the tribe faces is getting program recipients to follow through when information is needed during the application process.

Delays are frustrating for everyone involved.

“To the person living on the street, to them, time is of the essence,” Williams said. “They want to get things going now. Like food stamps. I need food stamps.

I’m hungry, I haven’t eaten. Then I have to wait. Wait a minute, I could be dead by then.”

Participants in this story, both the homeless and those who serve them, had varying ideas for solutions to the issue.

More shelters. More affordable housing. More transportation. More funding. More education. More behavioral health support. More accountability. More community awareness.

“We try,” said Kleweno. “We try to help in whatever way possible.”

### Na’ini Social Services

For more information about homelessness and related issues, please contact the tribe’s Na’ini team weekdays at 907-335-7600.

### Project Homeless Connect

When: Jan. 24  
Where: Soldotna Regional Sports Complex  
What: Supplies, support and resources available to those in need.  
Contact: 907-420-4514



Ruhl’s living conditions are better than those of some homeless people. “I’m making it,” she said.

## Keeping the community warm

### Local Girl Scouts donate items to tribe’s sleeping bag and blanket drive

A local group of Girl Scouts has kicked a sleeping bag and blanket drive into overdrive.

Troop 254, which includes elementary and middle school students from the Kenai area, donated 129 warm items to the tribe in December. The group of 10 girls delivered the gear to the Na’ini Family and Social Services building.

The donation went toward a sleeping bag and blanket drive the tribe began early this winter to support the homeless and others in need. The tribe has been giving out the items as needed and will bring a large batch to Project Homeless Connect on Jan. 24. The event makes many resources available to homeless people across the community.

“They are people that you want to help,” said Alea Faulkner, one of the scouts who participated.

Troop 254 began collecting items for the tribe’s drive in

mid-November. The scouts received donations from classmates, friends and family members. They also made flyers, promoting the effort online and around town.

Michelle Ostrowski, troop leader, said the effort aligned with Girl Scout values and other projects on which the scouts had been working.

“It’s all about figuring out where you fit in the community and growing up and the challenges that we have,” Ostrowski said.

Faulkner, who is in seventh grade at Kenai Middle School, took the effort one step farther.

In addition to sleeping bags and blankets, she also collected socks. She had gathered more than 400 as of mid-December. Her goal is to reach 600. She is partnering with the Kenai Centennial Savvy Lion Club on the effort.

Faulkner will set up a stand and give the socks to people at Project Homeless Connect. Her plan is to include friendly, handmade notes with each pair.

“Socks are the most needed, least donated thing for the homeless,” Faulkner said. “So I thought it would be a good idea.”

If you would like to donate, please contact the tribe at 907-335-7600.



From right, Girl Scout Cadettes Alea Faulkner, Zaraphina Tucker, Anna Mae Gilliam and Dani Buffan carry 129 blankets and sleeping bags into the tribe’s Na’ini Family and Social Services building. The girls, members of Troop 254, heard about the tribe’s blanket and sleeping bag drive for the homeless and set out to help.



# Native Pride Dancers

*Enjoy the beauty  
and power of a  
family-oriented,  
indigenous  
performance.*

*A fundraiser for the  
Yaghanen Youth Program*

*7 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 27  
Kenai Central High School*



**Tickets: \$15**

Available at the door or  
Kenaitze administration office  
150 N. Willow St. in Kenai  
Contact: Michael Bernard,  
907-335-7290





# Dena'ina Wellness Center

## Optometry Program

Healthy eyes are an important part of overall wellness.

*Routine check-ups*

*Comprehensive exams*

*Contact lens fitting*

*Disease management*

*Schedule an appointment today!*



**Contact us at 335-7500**

# Start your Kenaitze career

Join a family-friendly, innovative work environment offering a range of career paths. Professional opportunities include medical, administrative, education and more. Visit our careers page at [www.kenaitze.org](http://www.kenaitze.org) for current openings and detailed job descriptions.

**Medical, Dental, Life Insurance**  
**Paid Time Off • Holidays**  
**Extended Sick Leave • 401(K)**

For more information, contact our recruiting office at **907-335-7200**





## University seeks Alaska Native student input

The University of Alaska Anchorage is surveying Alaska Native students to measure how well students feel they are being served by the school.

The survey is brief and anonymous. It is open to past, present and future Alaska Native students. To complete the survey, go here: [http://uaa.col.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_20u-vacglaWqiLBj](http://uaa.col.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_20u-vacglaWqiLBj).

On average, between 180 and 260 Alaska Native students graduate from the school each year, according to the university. More than 2,000 Alaska Native and American Indian students attend the university.

For additional information, contact the university's Alaska Native Studies Program at 907-786-6135.



Smartphone users can use this QR code to access the survey.

## Youth tribal member elected to CIRI role

Tribal member Cheyenne Wilson, 16, has been elected to the Cook Inlet Region Inc. Shareholder Participation Committee as a youth representative.

The committee works on a range of projects to support CIRI descendants and prepare future leaders for success. Wilson, a 10th grader at Kenai Central High School, will serve a two-year term.

Wilson has participated in one committee event since her election, attending a potluck and touring CIRI programs. Wilson said the group will work to raise awareness around opportunities available to CIRI youth. She said she learned a lot and met fellow youth.



Cheyenne Wilson

"It was a really cool experience," Wilson said.

Wilson also is a member of the tribe's Youth Council, Gganilchit Dena'ina – "stand up Dena'ina." The group works on community improvement projects and other efforts to support the tribe. Currently, it is raising awareness around the environmental impacts of plastic bags.



## Yaghanen children perform

Above, participants of the tribe's Jabila'ina Dance Group and Del Dumi Intertribal Drum Group perform a recital to a standing room only crowd of family members in December at Tyotkas Elder Center. At left, Evelyn Yeoman watches with delight as her grandchildren perform. The groups are run by the Yaghanen Youth Program.

## Tribe hosts Elders Christmas party

Food, prizes and Santa highlight annual event

Before dinner was served at the 2017 Tyotkas Elder Center Christmas party, Anecia and Wesley Tretikoff remembered one of the first people they met at Tyotkas.

It was Maggie Jones, a longtime Tyotkas employee who died last year after a battle with cancer.

"Maggie made us feel really welcome, warmly welcome, every time until she passed," Anecia Tretikoff said. "It was that warm welcome from her that brought us back initially."

The Tretikoffs, husband and wife, were among nearly 70 Elders who attended the annual holiday party in December. The event is a fundraiser for Tyotkas, which delivers a range of Elder services.

The evening included a prime rib buffet, silent auction and special appearance by Santa. There also were prize giveaways, as winners received themed gift baskets made by programs across the tribe.

Karla Evarts, Tyotkas program administrator, said the event is a nice way to come together and recognize Elders as the calendar turns.

"Just to close the year with a



Santa Claus (Steve Vin Zant) listens as Rose Guilbeau tells him what she wants for Christmas at the Elders Christmas Party at Tyotkas Elder Center in December.

celebration for our Elders," she said.

This was the second Tyotkas Christmas party the Tretikoffs attended. They enjoy the fellowship of the Elder center and meeting other Alaska Native and American

Indian people. It feels like family, they agreed.

And it was Jones who first made them feel welcome. That is something they won't forget.

"She was real nice to us," Wesley Tretikoff said.



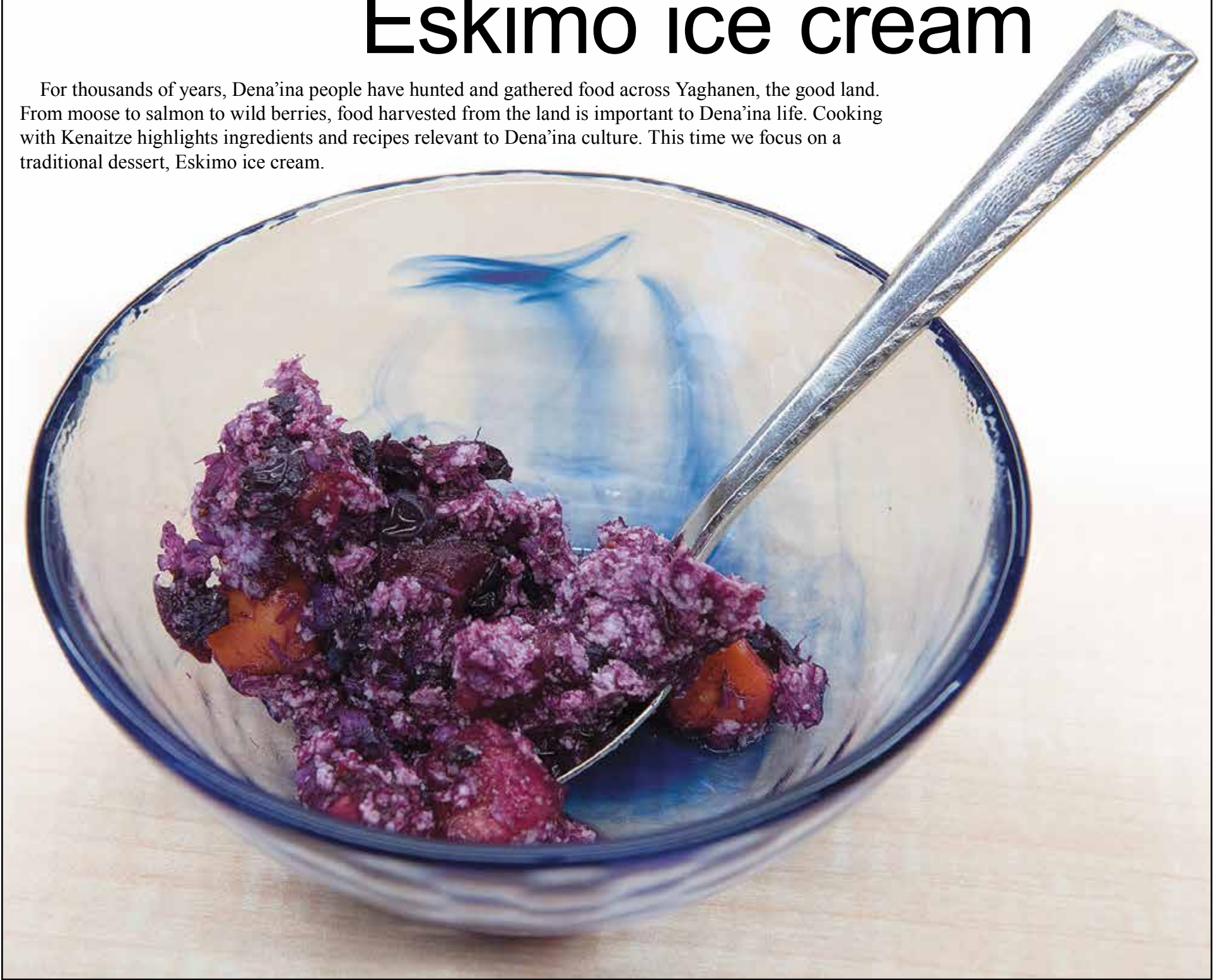
# Yaghali Nusdlan

*He or she got well*



## Cooking with Kenaitze: Eskimo ice cream

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 a traditional dessert, Eskimo ice cream.



It has many names - chitl’ nivagi in Dena’ina, akutaq in Yupik, Eskimo ice cream in English. Most agree it’s a tasty treat.

**SUBMIT YOUR FAVORITE RECIPE**  
*Chiqinik* to those who submitted these recipes. Have a recipe to share? Email it to M. Scott Moon at [smoon@kenaitze.org](mailto:smoon@kenaitze.org)

### ESKIMO ICE CREAM – THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

**Ingredients**

2 cups of new seal oil  
1 to 1 ½ pounds reindeer fat, dried  
1 gallon wild berries

**Directions**

Boil the oil in the reindeer fat for 2 or 3 minutes. Cool until lukewarm. Take a bowl full of loose snow, not too powdery, and add oil. Hand beat well. Let freeze a bit, but not too much. Fold in wild berries.

*Recipe courtesy of Mary Lou Bottorff, Kenaitze tribal Elder.*

### FAVORITE ESKIMO ICE CREAM

**Ingredients**

1 gallon berries, any kind  
About 1 cup Crisco  
About 1 cup sugar

**Directions**

Mix the berries into the Crisco. Add sugar, to taste, stirring until creamy. Avoid adding too much sugar. Optional: add one or two raw eggs for an extra creamy texture.

*Recipe courtesy of Godelieve Tunuchuk, cook at Chaputnguak School in Chefnak, Alaska.*



# The Big Picture



Employees, tribal members and friends of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe “rock their mocs” at the Dena’ina Wellness Center on Rock Your Mocs day in November. The annual event celebrates American Indian and Alaska Native culture.

## 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  
888-335-8865 fax

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

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

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

**Environmental Program**  
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  
907-335-7219

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

