

# The Counting Cord



## **Flowing**

*Tuten Charter School  
receives board approval*

## **Working together**

*Environmental program expands  
reach through partnerships*

## **Redo**

*Election results contested  
at Annual Meeting*

**Fall 2024**

**FREE!**

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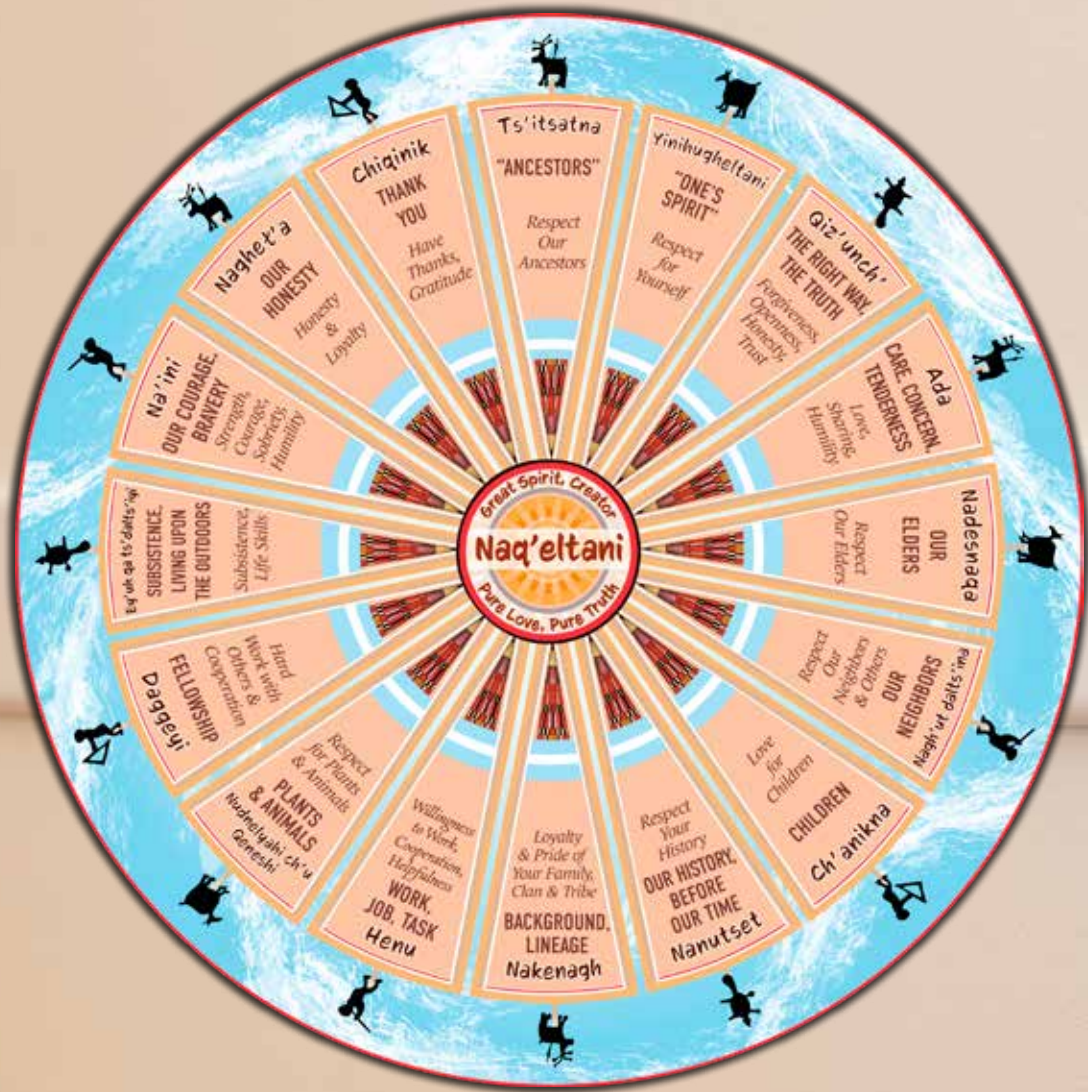


## Marking the days with a counting cord

A counting cord, nitnuqeyishi, "the thing that is knotted," is a traditional Dena'ina string calendar. Knots or beads or feathers are tied into the cord to mark the days or record special events.

The Counting Cord publication is the newsletter of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. It is published quarterly to mark the days and record the special events of Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina, "the Kenai River People."

# Ada | Care, Concern, Tenderness



Nora Milligrock hugs Rheanna Daily, a Program Specialist at Tyotkas Elder Center, after Milligrock opened new winter clothes gifted to her through the center's Fall in Love With Elders program. Staff from across the Tribe shopped for participating Elders, demonstrating the Traditional Value of Ada, care concern and tenderness.





# Yaghali du?

Just before Thanksgiving, we received some wonderful news – the Tribe’s application to launch a charter school has been accepted by the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District!

The Tuten Charter School will initially serve students in kindergarten through third grade, with the potential to expand and grow as needed. The school will be housed at the Kahtnuht’ana Duhdeldiht Campus, and its curriculum will be grounded in traditional Dena’ina culture, language and values.

Over the past several months, our Tuten Charter School work group has been meeting to put together our application. The Tribe presented our proposal to the school district’s Charter School Oversight Committee in early October, and again later in the month with follow-up answers to their questions. We shared our plans with the Board of Education during an early November work session, and our application was approved by the board on Nov. 18.

Chiqinik, thank you, to the Tuten Charter School work group, which has put in so much hard work on this application. The group has been led by Education Director Kyle McFall, and includes Tuten Charter School Academic Policy Committee Members Diane Bernard, Dr. Katie Archer Olson, Kaylee Garrod, Chantilly Bayes, Jennifer Williams, and myself, as well as Karl Kircher, Donita Slawson, Joel Isaak, Rudy Wilson, Jon Ross, Austin Stevensen, Sara Battiest, Doug Gates, and Michelle Feldman.

The work group also worked closely with the Education committee to develop the school’s goals and mission statement.

Our charter school application still needs approval from the state Board of Education, and there is work to be done to hire staff and configure the top floor of the Kahtnuht’ana Duhdeldiht Campus for learning.

A school rooted in traditional values and knowledge has long been a vision for our Tribe, and I am excited for the future as we take a giant step forward. Education is one of our guiding principles, and teaching our youth is a key “to assure Kahtnuht’ana Dena’ina thrive forever.”

Duk’idli, respectfully,  
Bernadine Atchison  
Tribal Council Chair



**Bernadine Atchison**  
Chair  
batchison@kenaitze.org



**Jakob Kooly**  
Vice Chair  
jkooly@kenaitze.org



**Ronette Stanton**  
Secretary  
ronette.stanton@kenaitze.org



**Wayne D. Wilson Jr.**  
Treasurer  
wwilsonjr3@gmail.com



**Michael Juliussen**  
Council Member  
Michael.Juliussen@kenaitze.org



**Mary Ann Mills**  
Council Member  
mmills42346@gmail.com



**David Segura**  
Council Member  
DaveSegura@kenaitze.org



# Rememberance



People gather around the fire at Ggugguyni T'uh, Raven Plaza, at the Dena'ina Wellness Center on Sept. 30 for an Orange Shirt Day Remembrance and Recognition Ceremony. Orange Shirt Day raises awareness of intergenerational trauma from boarding schools and honors the healing journey of Elders and their families. The ceremony included songs from the Heartbeat of Mother Earth drum group.

## 'We talk to each other'



Representatives from Ninilchik Village Tribe, SPITwSPOTS and Kenaitze Indian Tribe sign an agreement that will improve broadband internet access and cost for members of both tribes through Nił Qenach'delghesh, an intertribal consortium formed in 2021. Pictured from left: Maria Goins, B.Ed and Ninilchik Village Tribe Chief Finance Officer; Greg Encelewski, Ninilchik Village Tribe President; Aaron Larson, SPITwSPOTS owner; Wayne D. Wilson Jr, Kenaitze Tribal Council Member and Nił Qenach'delghesh Board Chair; and Ronette Stanton, Kenaitze Tribal Council Secretary. Kenaitze Tribal Members have been mailed information regarding benefits available to them through the partnership.



# Eventful Annual Meeting

Contested results lead to redo of Tribal Council election vote



*The Tribal Council and Kenaitze dancers enter the gathering space singing "Potlatch Song of a Lonely Man" at the start of the Annual General Membership Meeting.*

A motion at the Annual General Membership Meeting to challenge the Tribal Council election results led to a redo of the vote and a different election outcome.

Tribal Members elected Jakob Kooly, Mary Ann Mills and David Segura to two-year terms on the Council. They join Bernadine

Atchison, Ronette Stanton, Wayne D. Wilson Jr., and Michael Juliussen on the seven-member Council.

Following certification of the vote, the Council met to determine officers. Atchison will continue to serve as Tribal Council Chair. Kooly will serve as Vice Chair, Stanton as Secretary, and Wilson as Treasurer.

Tribal Members gathered for the Annual General Membership Meeting on Oct. 5 to elect three Tribal Council Members. In the initial vote, Kooly, Gabriel Juliussen Jr., and Diana Zirul were elected to fill the open Council seats.

However, while ballots were being counted, a question and





Top: Tribal Council Treasurer Gabriel Juliussen Jr. presents the Tribe's financial report. Above: Both floors of the gathering space are used for the meeting at the Kahtnuht'ana Duhdeldiht Campus.

answer session became contentious over the structure and finances of the Kahtnuht'ana Development Corporation, the Tribe's for-profit business entity.

After voting results were announced but before the newly elected candidates were sworn in, a motion was made by a

Tribal Member to contest the election results, based on information shared during the question-and-answer session. A majority of Tribal Members present voted in favor of the motion.

The Tribal Council scheduled a re-do of the voting, with mail-in and drop-off ballots due Nov. 1

'We've created a lot of good things. We created this school, we created the Dena'ina Wellness Center. We have the infrastructure to be a financial powerhouse in the community, we just need leadership. The sky's the limit.'

- Jake Kooly,

Tribal Council Vice Chair

and in-person voting available on Nov. 2. The Council also hosted an informational meeting about the Kahtnuht'ana Development Corporation on Oct. 26.

Kooly led all candidates with 119 votes. Segura was second with 104 votes, followed by Mills with 102 votes.



*Mary Ann Mills casts her vote at the Annual General Membership Meeting on Oct. 5.*

Zirul received 97 votes; Juliusen received 94 votes; Maria Sweppy received 93 votes; Logan Wik picked up 42 votes; and Jeff Swan received 27 votes.

In his candidate's speech during the Annual Meeting, Kooly said the Tribe needed better leadership.

"We've created a lot of good things. We created this school, we created the Dena'ina Wellness Center. We have the infrastructure to be a financial powerhouse in the community, we just need leadership," Kooly said. "... The sky's the limit. I'm here to hopefully make the best decisions for all of you. I think I have a vision, with the current Council and leadership, we could really do something great."

Mills took the opportunity to share some of her personal history of working for Alaska Native rights.

"I started over 50 years ago, advocating for Alaska Native

people, so I've spent pretty much most of my life doing that," Mills said.

Mills said her efforts started as a child, when she saw shopkeepers overcharge her mother and corrected them.

"That was the beginning of standing up for my people's rights, and my mother's rights," Mills said.

She saw other injustices while working at the Alaska Native Service Hospital, and then with the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act without a vote from Alaska Native people.

"I believe in basic, sacred, fundamental human rights. That's what I'm about," Mills said.

Segura said some of his fondest memories are of running the educational moose hunt with his father, James Segura. One of his key issues is the sustainability of services that start as grant programs, and the potential consequences when the grant ends.

"Fiscal responsibility is not something to be taken lightly," Segura said.

He also wants to see employment and career training opportunities for Tribal Members, and more accountability for the Tribal Council.

"I am passionate about the chance to make a difference, and giving our Tribal Members a voice in the growth of their Tribe," Segura said.

During the meeting, Rudy Wilson, a Tribal Member, was introduced as the Tribe's new Executive Director. Wilson had served as the Tribe's Operations Director since April 2023, and interim Executive Director since August.

Tribal Membership also approved enrollment for 92 new Tribal Members, bringing the Tribe's total membership to 2,094.

Three Tribal Members were honored for their contributions to Alaska Native culture, heritage and communities.

Savannah Sparks received the Youth Recognition Award.

"Your drive for learning and your willingness to help others inspire those around you," said Tribal Council Secretary Ronette Stanton in announcing the award.

Stanton noted that Savannah is a Daggeyi Intern, a passionate hockey player, dedicated volunteer and role model for other youth.

Evelyn (Baktuit) Boulette received the Elder Recognition Award.

Council Member Michael Juliusen said Evelyn has always been proud of her heritage, and served the Tribe as a Council



Member and on a number of boards and committees, including the Election Board, Enrollment Committee, Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina Health Board, Behavioral Health Committee, and the KDHB Quality Committee.

"Evelyn has always been dedicated to passing on her knowledge of the Tribe, and has been active in each of the roles in which she has served," Juliussen said. "Evelyn's dedication to her heritage goes beyond the Tribe. She has been a longstanding member of the Kenai Historical Society. She has worked closely with the society to establish the Kenai Historical Park, where her grandparents' home is maintained. She has provided guided tours of the park and shared stories of what life was like for her ancestors."

The late Bill Segura was given the Legacy Award. The award was accepted by his family, which overflowed the stage during the presentation.

"For the last eight years, we've been giving out awards for youth, Fall 2024



*Top Left: Council Member Michael Juliussen presents the Elder Recognition Award to Evelyn (Baktuit) Boulette. Top Right: Savannah Sparks, center, receives a hug from Tribal Council Secretary Ronette Stanton and congratulations from Sasha Jackson while accepting the Youth Recognition Award. Above: Sandy K Wilson, center top in white, dabs a tear while accepting the Legacy Award on behalf of her father, the late Bill Segura. Many family members joined in the recognition.*

Elders and legacy, and we wanted to recognize Tribal Members who have done significant things for the Tribe," said Council Member Wayne D. Wilson Jr. "For me personally, Bill was an amazing guy. ... He was always there for us, always talking with us, just a good inspiration for us."

Wilson said that Bill "was everyone's uncle." He was especially proud of his work to manage the Tribe's educational fishery.

"Uncle Bill loved teaching youth about processing fish, smoking fish, and mending nets. He was very patient with everyone that was learning to fillet fish. He always knew when the fish were running, sometimes because of the fish fog, or when he heard the birds singing. Most of our memories of Uncle Bill are when we were fishing the net. He made fishing so much fun, with all of us working together," Wilson said.



## Tribe discusses Kahtnuht'ana Development Corporation plans



*Diana Zirul, right, questions Bruce Gabriel during an informational meeting for the Tribe's Kahtnuht'ana Development Corp. Gabriel is the corporation's CEO and Vice President.*

After the topic of the Kahtnuht'ana Development Corporation drew a number of comments during the Annual Meeting, the Tribal Council hosted an informational meeting to provide details and answer questions about the Tribe's for-profit business entity.

The meeting provided background information on and history of the Kahtnuht'ana Development Corporation, as well as current plans and future goals. Fifty-eight Tribal Members were in attendance.

The KDC is federally chartered under Section 17 of the Indian Reorganization Act. It is wholly owned by the Tribe, but separate from the Tribal government. KDC held its first board meeting in 2013 with the goal of growing a profitable business to return revenue to the Tribe and increase self-sufficiency.

The Tribal Council appoints members to three-year terms on the five-member KDC Board of Directors. Two of the board members may be non-Tribal Members. The current board includes President Gabriel Juliussen Jr., Vice

President Bruce Gabriel, Secretary Virginia Wolf, Treasurer Sagen Juliussen, Rudy Wilson, and Council Liaison Michael Juliussen.

KDC hired Gabriel as CEO over the summer, and received an \$8 million business development loan this fall. The Tribe has co-signed the loan.

The Tribe has also transferred \$2 million in American Recovery Plan Act funding to KDC to provide economic development services for Tribal projects and government activities.

KDC's future plans, Gabriel said, are to purchase one or more construction companies and pursue a variety of government and private sector contracts. As an Alaska Native-owned entity, KDC would have a competitive advantage bidding for those projects.

KDC would also like to erect and move into the pre-engineered metal building originally purchased to house the Transportation program. The cost to complete the project would be \$3.2 million, with the money also coming from the Tribe's unused ARPA funds.

The biggest concerns voiced during the meeting were transparency for board of directors' actions, potential for conflicts of interest, and mechanisms for Tribal Members to provide input or oversight. Tribal Members also expressed concern over KDC's limited success in the past 10 years.

Gabriel acknowledged that KDC should have been more transparent in the past, and said that a better financial reporting system has been established with help from the Tribe's Finance department.

Juliussen said that conflict of interest rules are addressed in the corporation's by-laws, and noted that he has recused himself from votes related to KDC during his tenure on the Tribal Council.

With regard to past performance versus future success, Gabriel cited his success in growing his family business into one with a nationwide footprint. He asked the he be given a chance to move forward with the KDC board's plan.

While some Tribal Members shared concerns with KDC, others expressed support, citing goals of Fall 2024



*Top: Bruce Gabriel, CEO of the Kahtnuht'ana Development Corp., speaks during the meeting. Above: Gabriel Juliussen Jr., Council Treasurer and KDC President, answers a question.*

making the Tribe more self-sufficient and less reliant on federal grants, and for the potential career

training and employment opportunities a successful corporation would bring.



# Up for the Challenge

## Hoka Hey ride supports Yaghanen programs



Bernadine Atchison's granddaughter Jayda Mitchell sits on the back of a Hoka Hey rider's motorcycle at the finish line celebration in Homer.

**'The organizers of the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge believe that they are the hope for the future and we want to help cultivate strong, capable individuals who will be able to face challenges we Elders cannot even imagine.'**

*- Beth Durham, Hoka Hey Director of Operations*

One hundred sixty-six motorcyclists rolled into Homer in mid-August for the finish of the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge, the conclusion of a transcontinental ride that started in Daytona, Florida.

This year marked the 10th edition of the Hoka Hey Challenge, organized by Medicine Show LLC. Part of the Challenge's mission is to support the Indigenous groups over whose traditional



*A participant in the Hoka Hey Challenge crosses the finish line in Homer. Some riders raised donations for the Tribe's Yaghanen Youth Program.*

lands the Challenge passes. This year, that support resulted in more than \$20,000 in donations to the Tribe's Yaghanen Youth Language and Culture program.

Tribal Council Chair Bernadine Atchison was on hand to greet Challenge riders at the finish line in Homer. Atchison said she enjoyed meeting the riders at the finish line, and learning about their journeys. She also expressed gratitude for the donations, which will support the Tribe's work to help youth grow and thrive.

The Hoka Hey Challenge raises awareness of social issues while routing riders through some of the most rugged parts of the country. Riders are encouraged to raise funds for a cause that is important to them.

"I was so impressed," Atchison said of her experience at the finish line. "The main thing is the riders can do fundraising for any non-profit. So if you like riding a motorcycle, it's a good opportunity to raise money."

Organizers say the Hoka Hey Challenge tests each rider's navigation skills, fortitude, temperament, attitude, determination, and technical riding ability. Their goal is to cultivate wisdom, community and compassion, and to foster respect, harmony, peace and friendship.

Hoka Hey Director of Operations Beth Durham said via email that the event organizers generally look for ways to help young people with their fundraising efforts.

"The organizers of the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge believe that they are the hope for the future and we want to help cultivate strong, capable individuals who will be able to face challenges we Elders cannot even imagine," Durham wrote. "The Yaghanen Youth Programs seemed the perfect fit for these goals and for your own Tribal motto 'The Tide is Coming In.' We want that tide to bring great abundance to the young people of today."

This year's ride started with 226 Challengers in Daytona, Florida on Aug. 4. Riders covered the 10,000-mile journey in about two weeks.

Learn more about the Hoka Hey Motorcycle Challenge at <https://hokaheychallenge.com>.



# The river will flow

Tribe receives school district approval for Tuten Charter School



*Representatives from Kenaitze's Tribal Council, leadership team and Education department clap upon hearing the unanimous vote in favor of the Tribe's charter school application by the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Board of Education. The vote took place in a special meeting on Nov. 18.*

The Tuten Charter School moved another step closer to reality with approval of the Tribe's application from the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Board of Education.

"Our Tribe's vision is 'to assure Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina thrive forever.' For many years, a school grounded in traditional Dena'ina culture and values has been an integral part of that vision," said Tribal Council Secretary Ronette Stanton. "We look forward to providing an educational experience where our culture and traditional knowledge are interwoven with all aspects of learning to foster a sense of pride, belonging and self-confidence."

The school board approved the Tribe's application for a five-year period during a special meeting on Nov. 18. All nine board members voted in favor of approval.

The application is now being forwarded to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. The last step in the application process is approval from the State Board of Education. The state board is expected to consider the Tuten Charter School application during its March 2025 meeting.

The Tribe's plan for Tuten Charter School is to open in the fall of 2025 for students in kindergarten through third grade, with the option for future expansion as needed. The school's curriculum will be grounded in traditional Dena'ina language, culture and values.

Tuten is a Dena'ina word meaning "the current is flowing" or "the river will flow."

The Tribe's vision is for the school "to be a beacon for educational excellence and cultural pride." The

vision statement describes a school "where the richness of Dena'ina cultural heritage is interwoven into every aspect of learning, fostering a deep sense of belonging, pride, and self-confidence."

The school will be housed at the Kahtnuht'ana Duhdeldiht Campus. Traditional Dena'ina learning will be integrated with a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics curriculum.

Initial staff will include a principal/teacher, a full-time certified teacher, a full-time teacher with a special education endorsement, a three-quarter-time certified teacher, and half-time administrative assistant. These staff members will be school district employees.

The Tribe will provide support services, contracted through a memorandum of understanding with the district. Details for the MOU are being worked out.





*Above: The board listens, at right, as Kyle McFall, Kenaitze Education Director, responds to a question. Below: Kyle McFall, Kenaitze's Education Director, answers a board member's question during the special meeting.*

School board members and district administrators praised the Tuten Charter School plan, with several calling it "much-needed" and "exciting," and offering congratulations.

Board Member Sarah Douthit, who represents Kenai, said that it's been exciting for her to watch the Kahtnuht'ana Duhdeldiht Campus take shape.

"Watching the building go from the ground up has been so exciting, and this is another step in that. I'm so excited for our neighborhood, and for our students who get to celebrate their culture, to learn more about their culture. This is something I'm excited for Kenai to have. ... I'm so proud that we're bringing this to Kenai, and really looking forward to your progress," Douthit said.

Board Member Dianne MacRae, who represents Kasilof, summed it up with an emphatic "Chiqinik!"

District Superintendent Clayton Holland said he is looking forward to welcoming the district's 43rd school when Tuten opens next fall.

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"I want to acknowledge all of the hard work that's gone into this charter and all of the good people working on it," Holland said. "... It's been a long time coming, and something needed for our community. We've had a great long-term partnership with Kenaitze over the years, and I look forward to continuing with that, just in a different manner. Thank you for all the good work from everyone here today."

During the public comment portion of the special meeting, Donita Slawson, the Tribe's Yaghanen K-12 Program Manager, said she grew up in the school district, and became a teacher because of it. She said she would love for her 1-year-old granddaughter to have the opportunity to attend Tuten Charter School and to learn about her culture, heritage and story.

"Long ago, the Dena'ina felt invisible. Today, with the Yaghanen program ... we're able to teach ourselves who we are, to give that confidence to our children, to give them the knowledge of who they are, who they represent, and be



able to let them know that they represent their community, but also their family," Slawson said.

Slawson offered thanks and gratitude to the board, both in English and Dena'ina.

"Thank you all for supporting this. I know it's been a long road, but it's been a dream, not only of mine, but of other parents for this charter school to happen. You're making a dream come true for so many," Slawson said.

To learn more about the Tuten Charter School, call Education Director Kyle McFall at 907-335-7254. If you are interested in enrolling your child, fill out an interest survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V3PCK7Q>.



# Working together

*Andy Wizik, a Conservation Biologist with the Tyonek Tribal Conservation District, works with Kenaitze Environmental Program Manager Alana Shaw to measure water temperature and quality in the Moose River near its confluence with the Kenai River in May. Water quality monitoring is being conducted in partnership with the Kenai Watershed Forum.*

On a sunny summer day in July, the Tribe's Environmental Program teamed up with Wellness staff and the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service to remove invasive weeds from the Dena'ina Wellness Center campus.

"When you're a small program, it's definitely about strategic partnerships," said Alana Shaw, the Environmental Program Manager.

"We have the outside partnership here with the Cooperative Extension, which is serving as an expert on the invasives and making sure we handle the materials properly. And then the internal partnership with Wellness has been great because we can focus not just on the plants that aren't from here

that we're trying to remove, but on the traditional plants that we do use."

During the event, participants removed several large trash bags' worth of invasive bird vetch from the naturally landscaped area in front of the Dena'ina Wellness Center and around Ggugguyni T'uh (Raven Plaza).

A few volunteers stopped by to help, along with staff and interns from the Environmental Program and the Ch'k'denetyah yuyeh greenhouses.

Once the bird vetch was removed, the area was reseeded with traditional native plants, such as wormwood and choco-

late lilies. Participants used "seed bombs," which were made at a workshop at the greenhouses, to spread the new seeds.

"If you're going to take something out, it's nice to try to put something back in so the invasives don't recolonize the area," Shaw said. "We wouldn't have been able to do that without Wellness' help and expertise."

Casey Matney, Assistant Professor of Extension, Agriculture and Horticulture, said his agency partners with the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area as well as other organizations that have land management authority. Invasive species receive special focus be-



*Alana Shaw laughs as she bags invasive bird vetch pulled from the Dena'ina Wellness Center grounds last summer. She led a group of volunteers in the project to help prevent the weed's spread.*

cause of the potential harm they can do.

"It changes the ecology of our natural landscape. It displaces other plants, and some of the plants that are out there can actually be toxic to wildlife," Matney said of invasive plants.

He cited "Mayday trees," also known as European bird cherry, which can be toxic to moose and take over riparian areas, as well as reed canary grass, which grows in wetland areas and make habitat less preferable for salmon.

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Bird vetch can change the soil composition of an area and strangle out native plants.

The area from which the bird vetch was removed was a best-case scenario for an invasive plant. Hardscape features and well-defined walking paths prevented further spread of the weed.

"For example, people who are down on the beach, when they're dipnetting, walking through weeds, it could get on their pants, on their shorts, on their socks and shoes, and then they carry it wherever

they go," Matney said. "By managing it (at the Dena'ina Wellness center), people that come here are not carrying it off to other places."

Management of invasive species fits with the Tribe's traditional values, and Shaw partnering with other organizations – and benefitting from their expertise – makes sense.

"There are other groups who have the same interests. We're all here on the peninsula, so why not work together, because we have the same goals," Shaw said.



*Above: Andy Wizik collects a water sample from the Moose River. Below: The samples are carefully labeled for analysis.*

The Tribe is working with the Kenai Watershed Forum on water quality testing on the Kenai River, and has partnered with the Chugach Regional Resource Commission to do weekly ocean acidification sampling as part of a statewide network.

The Tribe also partnered with Stream Watch to do a beach clean-up after the dipnetting season.

Shaw said the work also dovetails with the EPA’s Indian General Assistance Program work the Tribe is doing.

“IGAP has yearly themes. Water quality and invasive species are two of our major themes this year,” Shaw said.



# Sanding and Snowplowing Services

- Available to income-eligible Alaska Native and American Indian Elders (age 55+) and disabled households within the Tribe's service area
- Over-income Kenaitze Tribal Elders and Tribal Members with disabilities are eligible through Tribal Member Services

**For details, contact the Kenaitze/Salamatof Tribally Designated Housing Entity at 907-335-7228**



*Kenaitze dancers perform during the 10-year anniversary celebration.*

# Tribe celebrates 10 years of services at the Dena'ina Wellness Center

In July, the Tribe celebrated 10 years of integrated health and wellness services at the Dena'ina Wellness Center.

Tribal Council Member and Kahtnuht'ana Dena'ina Health Board Chair Wayne D. Wilson Jr. said that when he was first elect-

ed to the Tribal Council in the late 1990s, a new health care facility was a Council goal. But it was also clear that plans at the time to remodel an existing building would not meet the Tribe's future need.

"We started working toward what we wanted, and the dream

got bigger and bigger and bigger. And at the time, we really didn't have any money," Wilson said. "So it was kind of a far-fetched dream that we had, and through a lot of different things, we were able to come up with a design for this building."



*Tribal Council Chair Bernadine Atchison welcomes visitors to the Dena'ina Wellness Center's 10-year anniversary celebration in July. She provided a brief history of the Tribe's health system.*

In her remarks during the event, Tribal Council Chair Bernadine Atchison talked about the milestones leading up to and since the opening of the Dena'ina Wellness Center in April 2014.

Atchison noted the Indian Health Service Joint Venture Award, which the Tribe received in 2011. The award covers 20 years of operations costs at the Dena'ina Wellness Center. She also noted the \$20 million grant from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, and the groundbreaking for the building in Old Town Kenai – a historical Dena'ina village site – in 2012. The Tribe also received financial support from the Rasmuson Foundation, the M.J. Murdoch Charitable Trust, Cook Inlet Region Inc., and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

When the building opened in 2014, it was staffed with about 80 people and the expectation was that it would serve about 3,500 un'ina. Today, there are about 150 employees working in the Tribe's Health Systems, and they serve 8,000 un'ina.

Since it opened in 2014, growth at the Dena'ina Wellness Center has included new lines of service, such as Optometry, as well as expansion of existing services, such as new offerings in the Dental department and expanded Wellness services.

Atchison also credited the many Tribal Members who shaped the design of the building.

Council Vice Chair Mary Ann Mills talked about many of the cultural features incorporated into the Dena'ina Wellness Center's design, starting with the landscaping around the building,

which includes many traditionally used plants and a sculpture of a Dena'ina family at fish camp, created by Tribal Member Joel Isaak. Ggugguyni T'uh, Raven Plaza, also serves as a gathering place. Its design, created by Tribal Member Jon Ross, marks the passage of time for the Kahtnuht'ana and shows the Tribe's traditional values.

Reclaimed wood from a local cannery where many Tribal Members once worked was used throughout the interior of the building. Agates and other stones gathered from the beach are used along the perimeter of the gathering space, and the color blue on the floor represents Kahtnu, the Kenai River.

Alaska Lieutenant Governor Nancy Dahlstrom also spoke at the event.

"As we gather here for this special occasion celebrating 10 years, we're not only commemorating the decade of exceptional service and community support, but we're recognizing the impact that this center has had on a lot of people in this community," Dahlstrom said. "The Dena'ina Wellness Center is a beacon of health, healing and hope for the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the broader community."

Donna Galbreath, Senior Medical Director of Quality Assurance with Southcentral Foundation, presented the Tribe with a gift representing the 10 years of service and the relationship between the Tribe and the foundation.

The celebration closed with singing, dancing, and drumming from the Kahtnuht'ana and Jabil'ina dance groups, and the Kahtnuht'ana drum group.



# Getting the reps

## Dental team welcomes student dentist



*Dental student Brielle Breland will return to the Dena'ina Wellness Center for another rotation this winter.*

As part of her dental training, Brielle Breland is completing a number of external rotations. The Dental department at the Dena'ina Wellness Center proved to be a perfect fit.

"This is amazing. I've learned so much since I've been here," Breland said at the end of her month-long rotation last spring.

Breland is studying dentistry at the A.T. Still University Arizona School of Dentistry and Oral Health, and plans to graduate in May 2025. She said she reached out to a number of clinics to set up her rotations, and with the Dena'ina Wellness Center, "everything fell into place."

"I had never been to Alaska, and always wanted to come here," Breland said.

Dr. Matthew Richards, the Dental Director at the Dena'ina Wellness Center, appreciated the enthusiasm Breland brought to the team.

"It was great," Dr. Richards said. "She was so excited to be here. ... It was nice to get a person with so much enthusiasm in here. It lifted us all up."

Breland was also well-received by un'ina, "those who come to us," Dr. Richards said. Dental staff made sure un'ina were comfortable with a student dentist performing their procedures. Dr. Richards said many commented that they hope she comes back after she graduates.

Breland said she benefitted from being able to see more un'ina than she does at the school clinic, where she would typically see one or two patients per day. At the Dena'ina Wellness Center, she was working with six to eight patients each day.

"It's a much faster-paced, real-life situation," Breland said.

"Getting the reps, the speed of real-world dentistry," Dr. Richards said.

Breland appreciated the opportunity to work one-on-one with Dr. Richards on more complicated procedures. She said she especially enjoyed performing root canals, because she did not have much opportunity to do those at school.

Breland said she was impressed with the Dena'ina Wellness Center and the updated equipment in the Dental department. She also enjoyed working with the staff.

"I love my coworkers," Breland said.

Alaska also appeals to Breland's sense of adventure. She has her pilot's license, and was able to do some flying while she was here.

"My dream job would combine piloting and dentistry," Breland said.

In addition to the morale boost, Dr. Richards said that having a student dentist allowed the busy department to see more un'ina during the day.

As an Indian Health Service Scholar, Breland also got a taste of working in an IHS facility. Under that program, IHS covers the cost of schooling in exchange for a commitment to work for an Indian health program.

"It gave her a good idea of what it's like working in IHS," Dr. Richards said.

Breland is also planning a rotation with her own tribe, the Pomo Indians of northern California.

"I want to give back to our people," Breland said.

Breland will be back in Kenai for a second rotation in December, and Dr. Richards said the department will continue to bring in student dentists in the future. In addition to training more dental care providers, it builds a pipeline for potential future staff members.

"I always think we need to keep on bringing people in. It's an opportunity to have a new dentist to call if another dentist leaves," Dr. Richards said.



# Cultivating a career

## Tribal Member explores plant biology



*Rich Hilleary, a post-doctoral researcher at Duke University, is studying how plant immune systems react to elevated temperatures.*

Growing up in a commercial fishing family in Nikiski, Rich Hilleary said he always had an interest in biology. Little did he know that interest would lead to a career in research.

Hilleary, a post-doctoral researcher at Duke University in North Carolina, is currently studying how exposure to elevated temperatures affects plant immunity. His work is mostly focused on a plant related to cabbage and lettuce with the goal of discovering basic fundamentals of biology.

"I like to see the biology happening," Hilleary said of his research.

Hilleary's family fished the East Forelands, and he said he was always exploring the beach. He graduated from Nikiski Middle-High School in 2003, but his first attempt at college didn't pan out. He took a year and a half off before working his way back into school.

He received support from the Tribe in the form of a scholarship to help with his undergraduate studies, something for which he is grateful.

"I was working full time, so having a little bit of help to cut back on that was good," Hilleary said.

Hilleary started to cultivate his interest in plant biology as an undergraduate as well. While working on his master's degree, he decided he wanted to earn his doctorate.

"Doing my Ph.D., I felt like I fit in very well in academia. I felt comfortable there," Hilleary said.

Through his studies, Hilleary earned a National Science Foundation graduate research fellowship to work with researchers at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. More recently, he also received a U.S. Department of Agriculture fellowship.

Hilleary said he wants to encourage students to explore, even if their career path isn't a straight line.

"When I first started, I didn't know what I was doing," Hilleary said. "I think it's OK to not know what you're doing. It's good if you have a trajectory, but it's also good if you want to explore."

## Share your news

Email [news@kenaitze.org](mailto:news@kenaitze.org) to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of the Counting Cord.

## Have you lost a loved one?

For information about services and support provided by the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, please contact Jessica Crump, Tribal Member Services Supervisor, by phone at 907-335-7204 or by email at [jcrump@kenaitze.org](mailto:jcrump@kenaitze.org).

# Bequsilna, *'those who are gone'*

## Paul Alexander Shadura II



Longtime Alaskan resident, avid commercial fishing advocate, and devoted father Paul Alexander Shadura II passed away abruptly on July 7, while helping a fellow fisherman work on a boat engine in Homer. He was 69 years old.

Paul was born on Dec. 5, 1954, in Seattle, Washington. He graduated from Seattle Central Community College in 1973. He spent much of his youth on his father's homestead off of Kalifornsky Beach Road alongside his uncle Isaac Shadura, who taught him the art of Cook Inlet set-netting.

Paul met his wife, Virginia, in 1979 while in California and talked her into moving up to Alaska to become a fisherman's wife, continue the family legacy in the Kenai area.

In later years, Paul took an active role in supporting the development of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, in which he was a Tribal Member, and served on the Constitution, Environmental Protection and Land Committees.

Paul is survived by his children, Christina Shadura of Alaska and Paul Shadura III of Florida and his family including daughter-in-law Betty and grandchildren Brian, Cole, Savanna and Pauly IV. He is also survived by three sisters and their respective families: Natalia Potebnya, Tamara O'Neal and Leda Barnes, all of Washington.

He was preceded in death by his wife of nearly 45 years, Virginia Shadura, who recently passed in January.

On July 9, a Russian Orthodox Panikhida service was held at Peninsula Memorial Chapel. A Celebration of Life will take place in the future. Remembrances may be sent to Christina and Paul at P.O. Box 1632, Kenai, Alaska 99611.

Read his full obituary at <https://bit.ly/PaulShadurall>.

## Violet May Sanders Young



Violet May Sanders Young passed peacefully, surrounded by her family and loved ones, on Sept. 9, 2024, in Dayton, Nevada.

She was a true daughter of Kenai, having been born there, as were her mother and her mother before her.

Violet was a Kenaitze Indian Tribal Member. She was born on Nov. 28, 1936, to Victor Sanders and Katerine Wilson Sanders. Violet was 87 years old at the time of her passing.

Violet was preceded in death by her husband of over 40 years, Mike Young. Mike and Violet traveled the country most of their marriage as Mike was a musician who was on the road often.

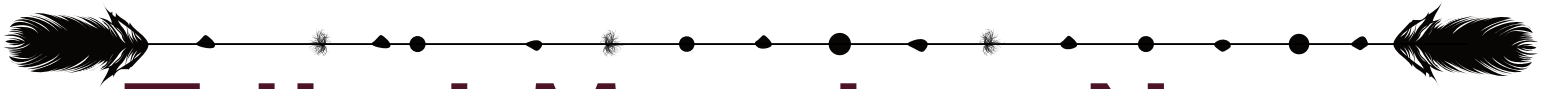
Violet had three daughters and is survived by her daughter, Joangail Wilder, of Elko, Nevada; her granddaughter Erica Violet Branson, of Lovelock, Nevada; her great-grandchildren, Lucy Joan Pitto, of Salt Lake City, Utah, and Luke Branson of Reno, Nevada.

Violet is also survived by her two adopted daughters, who she raised as her own, from infants. Nada Moses of Dayton, Nevada, and Sierra Moses, Violet's beloved granddaughter, were Violet's caretakers at the end of her life and took loving care of her until the very end.

The light of Violet's life was her youngest daughter, Alice Marie Tietz of Seattle, Washington, who she lived with most of her life. Alice was the love of Violet's life and they remained close throughout their lives.

Violet is also survived by her sister Freda (the second) in Homer, Alaska, and her nephews, Paul Karaffa Jr. and John Consiel Jr., and many other relatives in Kenai.

She was also preceded in death by her siblings, Freda Sanders Mann, Victor Sanders Jr., Elsie Consiel Cresswell, Marie Coffel, and Larry and Jimmy Sanders.



# Tribal Member News

## Boyuk Coxwell elected to Elders and Youth Council



Tribal Member Boyuk Coxwell was elected to the First Alaskans Institute Elders and Youth Council during the Statewide Elders and Youth Conference in Anchorage.

As a Council Representative, Boyuk will assist in planning the 2025 Elders and Youth Conference. Elders and Youth Council Representatives also identify challenges and share solutions relevant to their communities, serve as ambassadors for their region, and act as advocates for positive change.

Boyuk said serving on the Council is a great opportunity.

“My culture and history is my inspiration. I’m passionate about the past of my people and continuing the heritage and wealth of knowledge to our future generations. I would like to help Elders receive more current knowledge from the youth and for the youth to receive our culture’s knowledge and history from the Elders,” he said.

Boyuk said he plans to gather information about his community  
Fall 2024

ty and help with current issues as much as he can.

He will report his findings to the Council, and then “brainstorm and develop a doable plan to make real changes to benefit my people,” he said.

## Two join Tribal Court

This fall, two Tribal Members were sworn into service as Tribal Court Judges.

Michelle Kane was sworn in August 2024.



Judge Kane became a Tribal Court Judge to make a difference in the lives of Tribal Members and their families. She wants to be a person that Tribal Members can trust when they are at their most vulnerable and know that she has their best interests at heart.

The Tribe’s traditional values are important to Judge Kane. She appreciates the opportunity that the Tribal Court provides to make decisions based on traditional values and culture, with a focus on healing.

Judge Kane is undergoing Tribal Court training and learning the Tribal Court Code. She will attend the National American Indian Court

Judges Association Conference and National Indian Child Welfare Conference. She looks forward to pursuing additional training as opportunities arise. Judge Kane is also pursuing a bachelor’s degree in business administration.

Judge Kane looks forward to seeing her fellow Tribal Members heal and grow.

Liisia Blizzard was sworn in October 2024.



Liisia became a Judge to make a difference in people’s lives. She has a passion for justice and views serving with the Qiz’unch’ Tribal Court as an opportunity to make a meaningful impact in Tribal Members’ lives. She is especially committed to ensuring that Tribal children are able to grow up in safe and secure homes that are happy and loving.

Liisia began working for the Tribe in 1984, and took a week-long training for Tribal Court Judges early in her career, earning a certification. She has been a member of the Tribal Court Code Committee for many years, and is very familiar with the Tribal Court Code. She will continue to pursue additional training as it becomes available.

# Cooking with Kenaitze



Easy Chicken Pasta



# Easy Chicken Pasta

This dish is easy to prepare and uses ingredients you might already have in your cupboard, freezer or pantry.

Yield: 4 servings  
Prep time: 5 minutes  
Cook time: 25 minutes  
Calories per serving: 480

## Ingredients

12 ounces skinless, boneless, chicken breast  
8 ounces whole wheat penne pasta  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
4 cloves garlic  
1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper  
2 cups of green beans, frozen  
1 (14.5-ounce) can of diced tomatoes with green pepper, celery, and onions, undrained  
2 teaspoons dried basil  
1/2 cup parmesan cheese, grated

## Directions:

Cut the chicken breast into bite-size strips; set aside. Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain.

While the pasta is cooking, in a large nonstick skillet, heat the olive oil over

medium-high heat. Add garlic and crushed red pepper; cook and stir for 30 seconds. Add the green beans and cook until heated through. Remove the green beans from skillet.


Add your chicken to the hot skillet; cook and stir for 3 to 4 minutes or until it is no longer pink. Return the green beans to the skillet. Add undrained tomatoes, dried basil, and drained pasta. Cook, stirring occasionally, until heated through.

To serve, divide mixture among four shallow bowls. Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons of Parmesan cheese per bowl.

## Substitutions:

Broccoli or other green vegetables can be used in place of the green beans. Frozen, fresh, or canned vegetables can be used. Try Italian seasoning or oregano in place of the dried basil.

Wellness Coaching services are available to those we serve at the Dena'ina Wellness Center. If you are interested in learning more about healthy lifestyle choices, contact the Wellness department at 907-335-7588.



# Dena'ina naqenaga



## **Bentuggezh K'enulgheli** *Mt. Redoubt • 'one that has a notched forehead'*

Dena'ina naqenaga is "our Dena'ina language." Find more Dena'ina language resources online at <https://www.kenaitze.org/education/denaina-language-institute/>, including an interactive audio dictionary with many Dena'ina words and phrases.



# Addresses and Phone Numbers



**Administration Building**  
150 N. Willow St., Kenai  
907-335-7200



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



**Dena'ina Wellness Center**  
508 Upland St., Kenai  
907-335-7500



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



**Kahtnuht'ana Duheldiht Campus**  
12271 Kenai Spur Highway, Kenai  
907-335-7667



**Qiz'unch' Tribal Court**  
508 Upland St., Kenai  
907-335-7219



**Chuq'eya Qenq'a  
Birch Tree House –Behavioral Health**  
510 Upland St., Kenai  
907-335-7300



**Kenaitze/Salamatof Tribally  
Designated Housing**  
1001 Mission Ave., Kenai  
907-335-7228



**KENAITZE**  
**INDIAN**  
**TRIBE**

150 N. Willow St.

Kenai, AK 99611

[www.kenaitze.org](http://www.kenaitze.org)

907-335-7200



Kenaitze Indian Tribe  
P.O. Box 988  
Kenai, AK 99611



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