

New WISEFAMILIES programs already having an impact



In May, Kake elder Ruth Demmert was teaching three generations of Kake residents how to butcher a seal and render the fat into oil when she said, “*Yéi Naa Teech (It doesn’t get any better).*”

“*Yéi Naa Teech*” became the slogan for the WISEFAMILIES Through Customary and Traditional Knowledge program, which launched earlier this year in Kake and Wrangell.

“*We are having fun, and we’re hoping our group gets bigger,*” said Community Wellness Advocate Georgie Davis-Gastelum, who leads the Kake program. Tammi Meissner leads the Wrangell program.

The new WISEFAMILIES programs are funded through a five-year grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They are modeled after a similar and highly successful WISEFAMILIES program in Klukwan funded by the Indian Health Service. Participants in all three programs learn to harvest

and preserve traditional foods, and they learn Tlingít language, storytelling and other traditional skills such as carving and weaving. These traditional activities improve overall health and wellness, and research shows that a diet full of traditional foods can be a good way to prevent many chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Despite being new, the Kake and Wrangell WISEFAMILIES programs have been busy. Both programs have gone hooligan fishing, hosted Tlingít storyteller Gene Tagaban, gathered edible and medicinal plants, dug clams, hosted salmon camps and completed other subsistence activities. In Kake, they butchered and cooked a seal for the Honoring Our Elders dinner, and in Wrangell, they butchered a deer.

The Kake program partners with the Organized Village of Kake and the OVK Healing Heart Council program, the Kake Senior Center, the SEARHC Across Ages and Diabetes programs. The Wrangell program partners with Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp No. 1, the Johnson-O’Malley program, the Indian Education Act and the Healthy Wrangell Coalition. ❀

A Message from the President



We know being a patient can be a stressful time. Patients have health concerns and want to be treated with respect, dignity and courtesy.

That is why we have launched a new customer service training program. We want to create an environment where the patient wants to be treated and we meet their expectations.

You may see staff members wearing a button that says, "How may I help you?" These are people who have gone through our new training program. Eventually, all of our staff will be trained. We are taking positive steps to focus on customer service for our patients and their families.

Our staff will treat you with respect, dignity and courtesy; they will answer your questions using plain language; and they will include you as part of the team when it comes time to make decisions about your health. In other words, we will treat you the way we would want to be treated.

To be a better organization, we need your feedback. Please fill out the customer service questionnaires available at all SEARHC facilities. Your feedback will help make us a better health provider.

Roald Helgesen

Hoonah invites SEARHC to manage the Trudy Wolfe Health Center

At the invitation of the Hoonah Indian Association, SEARHC on Oct. 1 began managing the Hoonah clinic (the Trudy Wolfe Health Center).

"SEARHC is excited to join the Hoonah Indian Association in the delivery of local health services to the community of Hoonah," SEARHC President/CEO Roald Helgesen said. "We look forward to the continued partnership with the City of Hoonah, the Hoonah Indian Association, the Indian Health Service and the greater community to meet the health needs of the people of Hoonah. Our staff serving the community is our keystone to success."

The Hoonah Indian Association has been part of SEARHC since the consortium's creation in 1975. While HIA managed its own local clinic, SEARHC, HIA and the Indian Health Service maintained a long working relationship. SEARHC provides itinerant physician services from Sitka, itinerant dental services from Juneau, an annual mobile mammogram van visit, women's health services, itinerant optometry services, tobacco cessation by phone, WIC services, injury prevention services, telemedicine and many other services for Hoonah patients.

The new agreement allows Hoonah patients to enjoy the benefits of a larger network of quality health services. SEARHC has a four-year plan to stabilize and expand the current primary medical, dental, behavioral health and health promotion services to Hoonah.

The plan includes upgrades to the computer system and current facility; integrating the finance and billing systems; exploring new telemedicine services such as teleradiology, telepharmacy and telebehavioral health; and submitting a proposal to have the Hoonah clinic designated as a community health center by the federal government, which provides more funding to add new staff and expand other services. A key element of the plan is to design, secure funding for and build a new state-of-the-art facility to replace the current building.

"This four-year plan will be successful through our partnerships (with the City of Hoonah, the Hoonah Indian Association, the Indian Health Service and the greater community) to identify land and capital to build a new clinic that will meet health needs for years to come," Roald said. ❀



Preventing the spread of H1N1 requires extra care during flu season



This is the time of year when outbreaks of seasonal influenza are common, but this year there's an added twist — the novel H1N1 (swine) flu also is making the rounds.

The H1N1 flu has been making the rounds of Alaska since May, and seasonal flu usually arrives in November or December. Even though most cases are mild, both seasonal and H1N1 flu can be deadly to people from high risk groups (pregnant women, young children, elders, people with chronic diseases such as cancer, heart or lung disease, diabetes, etc.). Here are some ways you can help prevent the spread of the flu this winter.

Get vaccinated — Patients should take the time to get both a seasonal flu

shot when it becomes available in October and the new H1N1 flu shot when it comes out in November. Patients should get both shots, since there are different types of flu and each vaccine only protect against one strain.

Wash your hands and cough into your sleeve — Good hand hygiene and covering your cough go a long way toward preventing the spread of the flu. Wash your hands often with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer), especially after you sneeze or cough and after you touch your nose or eyes. Turn away from others and use a tissue or napkin to cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing. Cough into your upper sleeve or elbow if you don't have a tissue or napkin. Use sanitary wipes to clean surfaces where germs gather,

such as computer keyboards, telephones, light switches, stairway banisters, kitchen tables and counters, etc.

If you have flu symptoms, stay home and avoid public activities — Flu symptoms are cough, fever, body aches, runny nose, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhea. If you have flu symptoms, stay home, keep away from others and avoid all public activities until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone without medication. If you need to make a trip to receive medical care or pick up medications, please call before making a trip to your local clinic (unless it's an emergency). This allows us to prepare for your arrival so we can keep from infecting our other patients. If you have any flu symptoms, such as a high fever or cough, please let staff know once you arrive at the clinic. You will be given a mask to wear during your clinic visit and, if possible, you will be taken to a waiting area away from other patients.

In order to keep up with current outbreaks of seasonal and H1N1 flu, SEARHC staff is in regular contact with the Alaska Division of Epidemiology and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Find updated information on the flu at <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/> (state site) or <http://www.flu.gov/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> (national sites). There also is flu information on the SEARHC site at <http://www.searhc.org/h1n1/>. ❀



IHS funding increases health promotion, behavioral health services

The Indian Health Service recently made two funding awards that will allow SEARHC to offer new health education services in Wrangell and also to expand methamphetamine and suicide prevention services throughout the consortium.

In the first award, SEARHC received a three-year grant for a Healthy Wrangell program. The program will work in partnership with the Healthy Wrangell Coalition, the Wrangell Citizens for Clean Indoor Air Coalition and Wrangell Public Schools.

The grant allows SEARHC to hire a health educator in Wrangell who will work with community partners to increase access to fruits and vegetables in Wrangell schools and to increase the number of people in Wrangell who are protected from secondhand smoke. The new health educator will provide technical assistance for community groups working on the two main goals.

“This grant will assist existing Wrangell coalitions to move forward with initiatives they already have identified,” said Kathy O’Gara, Director of Health Promotion, SEARHC.

The new employee will work with Wrangell’s new school meal program to make sure healthy choices are available at all three schools. This employee also will educate Wrangell residents about the dangers of tobacco and secondhand smoke.

In the other award, SEARHC will be able to participate in the three-year IHS Methamphetamine and Suicide Prevention Initiative (MSPI) demonstration project throughout the consortium. The new project coordinator, who has yet to be hired, will be based in Juneau.

New services from this project include SEARHC contracting for a behavioral health crisis hotline that will be staffed 24/7 with master’s-level clinicians and provide services to all Southeast communities. The crisis hotline will coordinate all calls with SEARHC and other agencies.

The award also has SEARHC partnering with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to provide ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) classes to SEARHC communities. It also will train staff in all behavioral health access areas so they can screen patients for methamphetamine use.

“The project will focus on two goals that will allow SEARHC to expand and enhance innovative tribally operated services for IHS beneficiaries from 18 tribes. The long-term goal of the project is to develop and promote successful models to prevent and treat methamphetamine use and suicide prevention among tribal members,” said Melody Price-Yonts, SEARHC Behavioral Health Services Division Director. ❀

Domestic violence screening increased

Alaska has staggering rates of domestic violence compared to the rest of the country.

More than 6,000 cases of domestic violence were reported in 2005. Alaska’s rape rate is 2.5 times, and the rate of child sexual assault is nearly six times the national average.

This past year, SEARHC has screened all patients for domestic violence so patients in need can be referred to shelters and given information about protecting themselves.

“Simply by routinely screening patients for domestic violence, and providing them with information and referrals, we can make an enormous difference for victims and their children. And in some cases we can save lives,” said Nancy Jo Bleier, SEARHC Social Services Director.

SEARHC also works with four local domestic violence prevention programs that provide education and shelter. The shelters and their toll-free contact numbers are Sitkans Against Family Violence (SAFV, 1-800-478-6511), Aiding Women in Abuse and Rape Emergencies of Juneau (AWARE, 1-800-478-1090), Women In Safe Homes of Ketchikan (WISH, 1-800-478-9474) and Cordova Family Resource Center (CFRC, 1-866-790-4357). ❀

Around the Consortium

Consortium-wide

On Oct. 1, the Women, Infants, Children supplemental nutrition program (WIC) made significant changes to its national list of approved foods to provide more variety and give clients healthier food choices. To learn more, contact the SEARHC WIC office in Juneau at 463-4099 or toll-free at 1-800-330-2229, the SEARHC WIC office in Sitka at 966-8352 or toll-free at 1-877-966-8352, or the SEARHC WIC office in Ketchikan at 225-3392 or toll-free at 1-800-854-0878.

Juneau and Sitka

The SEARHC Dental program has hired its first prosthodontist, Dr. Mitchell Wilkinson, DDS, who will be based at the Juneau Dental Clinic. Dr. Wilkinson specializes in implants, partials, dentures, fixed bridgework and research. The dental program also added two general dentists to its staff, Dr. Ben Pinney, DMD, in Juneau, and Dr. Ben Warren, DMD, in Sitka.

Klukwan

The WISEGUYS men's wellness group this summer raised about 1,200 pounds of potatoes for the community of Klukwan. The WISEGUYS are part of the WISEFAMILIES Through Traditional Knowledge program. SEARHC Community Health Aide Michael Adams said they grew about 300-400 pounds of Tlingit potatoes, and the rest were Kennebecs, Chippewas and Yukon Golds. He also said they applied for a grant for a new sprinkler system to help with next year's crop. For more information, contact Michael at 766-6335.

Sitka

The Haa Toowóo Náakw Hít outpatient behavioral health clinic recently hired two psychologists and a psychiatrist. Dr. Dennis Pilgrim, PhD, will lead the telebehavioral health program. Dr. RD Boardman, PhD, heads the neurodevelopmental program. Dr. Sul Ross "SR" Thorward, MD, joined the staff as a psychiatrist.

Juneau

Dr. Jessica Scott, MD, has joined the permanent medical staff at the Ethel Lund Medical Clinic. Dr. Scott recently completed a residency with the Alaska Family Practice Residency program. She is Tlingit and grew up in Kake and Juneau. Her parents are Jay and Jennifer Scott.

Klawock

The Alicia Roberts Medical Center was one of 21 facilities around the nation to earn an Operating System One (OS1) green certification for the cleanliness of its facility. Also, SEARHC was honored with the Best Cleaning Industry Communications Award at the eighth annual (OS1) Users Symposium on July 19-21.

Physician Assistant Greg Sayers has joined the medical staff at the Alicia Roberts Medical Center. Greg previously spent time as a traveling mid-level practitioner at the Hydaburg Health Center.

Haines

The SEARHC Haines Health Center has been awarded the Business of the Year Award from the Haines Chamber of Commerce.

Skagway

Haines Health Center Medical Director Dr. Russ Bowman has started holding periodic clinics for SEARHC Native patients at the Dahl Memorial Clinic in Skagway. SEARHC also will be expanding wellness and other services into Skagway. To learn the dates of Dr. Bowman's next trip to Skagway, contact the Haines Health Center at 766-6300.

Patient Tip: As daylight fades, be safe, be seen

This is the time of year when Alaska gets dark earlier at night and the sun rises later in the day. It's also a time when more school children are outside walking along our roads.

Vehicles kill an estimated 5,700 pedestrians in the United States each year, and one out of every seven of them are children. Alaska ranks second among states in pedestrian deaths per capita. The following tips will help pedestrians and cyclists to be safer, and they also will make drivers more aware that pedestrians and cyclists are sharing the roads.

- ◆ **Wear reflectors.** Iron-on reflective tape, reflective ankle and arm bands and similar reflective items make it easier for drivers to see you.
- ◆ **Carry a flash light** or glow stick when you walk at night.
- ◆ **Walk facing traffic**, so you can see cars coming toward you and they can see you walking toward them. Don't assume drivers can see you.
- ◆ **When you ride a bike at night**, make sure you have a working solid white headlight on the front of your bike and red reflectors or a flashing red taillight on the back. Cyclists should ride with traffic, not facing it.
- ◆ **Be aware of your surroundings** by keeping your eyes and ears open at all times so you can see when cars enter traffic. This means turning off your music player and hanging up your cell phone.
- ◆ **Watch for blind spots in the road**, such as curves, trees and signs that can block a driver's view of you and your view of cars.
- ◆ **Car windows tend to frost over** during the fall and winter, so drivers need to clean off their windows and turn on the defroster to see.
- ◆ **Join your local Safe Routes To School program.** To learn how you can promote safe walking and cycling for kids in your neighborhood, go to the State of Alaska's Safe Routes To School page, which has lots of information about how to make your community safer for walkers and bicyclists. The link is <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwdplng/saferoutes/>.