

Don Beattie credits Raven's Way program with changing his life



Twenty years ago, Don Beattie was an out-of-control youth standing in a Yakutat courtroom while a judge was giving him a choice.

He could go to jail or he could try a new adolescent (ages 13-18) residential substance abuse treatment program SEARHC had just started that included a wilderness experience, and taught students healthy life skills to prepare them for life after treatment. Beattie said the choice between going to jail or going camping was a no-brainer, so he enrolled in Yéil Jeeyáx Raven's Way.

"I think Raven's Way did change my life," said Beattie, who works in Juneau for the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. *"I hate to think of where I would be now if I hadn't gone. I know it definitely was the right choice."*

Beattie was one of the first students to go through the Raven's Way program, joining the second Raven's Way class back in June-July 1989. He was a guest

speaker when Raven's Way celebrated its 20th anniversary last year.

Two things really stuck with Beattie from his days at Raven's Way, and he still thinks about them. Beattie worked with counselor Phil Moreno (now deceased), who told him, *"You can't help the way you feel, but you always can help the way you think and the way you act."* Beattie said he's had some rough moments, but Moreno's advice gets him through.

One of Beattie's defining moments came during the ropes challenge course in Sitka, which involved climbing a tall pole and then jumping for a trapeze bar in a leap of faith.

"It was a very spiritual moment for me," Beattie said. *"I jumped and made it, but I just barely got a grip on the bar. I caught it with the tips of my fingers and it was a struggle to get a good grip, but I did it and I was exhilarated. It was a real struggle, which is what my life had been like."*

More than 1,000 students from 144 Alaska communities have participated in Raven's Way since 1989. The program has been ranked as the most successful youth substance abuse treatment program in the Indian Health Service system. Find more at www.searhc.org/ravensway/. ❖

A Message from the President



This promises to be an exciting new year at SEARHC.

In 2010, we expect to launch two projects to upgrade our facilities at the Hydaburg Health Center and at the Trudy Wolfe Health Center in Hoonah. The Hydaburg project is fully funded, design work is complete, and we expect to start renovation and expansion of the new Hydaburg clinic this spring. In addition, we are upgrading the current facilities in Hoonah, while we draft a plan and start looking for funding to build a much-needed replacement clinic.

This year we will see major changes with our systems transformation project, which will be highlighted when we launch one of the first comprehensive electronic health records (EHR). This EHR will bring your patient files into one record, making it easier for our providers to view your complete patient record while helping to prevent diseases and reduce errors.

We are improving patient access, making it easier to get appointments when you need them, while also beefing up our customer service and quality of care. We also are providing more information about cancer prevention and treatment, especially colorectal cancers affecting many of our people.

These projects all are close to reaching a conclusion and we look forward to seeing them through in 2010.

Donald Helgesen

Make the most of your health care visit by being a prepared patient

All patients want the best health care possible. They want quality providers who are current on all the best practices and have all the new equipment. But one of the best ways to improve your health care is to become a better patient.

Becoming a better patient means you take charge of your health. You now are an active part of your health care team. It also means you better understand what's going on, and there are fewer errors. The following tips will help you have better health care visits.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your doctor can't read your mind. If something confuses you or is a concern, ask questions until you understand.

Take notes. Don't rely on your memory. Bring a notepad and pen with you so you can write down your provider's advice on how to keep an illness in check and actions you need to take before your next visit. Ask the provider for help spelling difficult words, so you can look up more information later.

Be prepared. Before your visit, make a list of all your prescriptions and doses, as well as any over-the-counter medicines and supplements you take. This list will help your provider avoid medication errors. If you have any unusual symptoms or changes in your health between provider visits, jot them down so you don't forget to mention them during your next visit. If your provider asked you to have any labs done, get them done a week or two before your visit so results are ready.

Bring a family member or friend. In the case of a serious illness or diagnosis, you might be emotional and need someone to support you. Your friend can take notes and ask questions you might not think to ask.

If you need to learn more about an illness or treatment, these sites provide reliable health information:

- ◆ <http://www.medlineplus.gov/>, National Library of Medicine site from the National Institute of Health.
- ◆ <http://www.healthfinder.gov/>, National Health Information Center site from the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.
- ◆ <http://www.kidshealth.org/>, From the Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media, with information for parents, teens and children.
- ◆ <http://www.tribalconnections.org/>, A health resources site from the National Network of Libraries of Medicine designed for Alaska Natives and American Indians (site has archive material but no longer is updated). ❀

SEARHC EMS offers wide range of first aid, wilderness medicine classes



EMS Instructor Eric Van Cise teaches VHOP students about the automatic external defibrillator

In his many years as a commercial fisherman, SEARHC Emergency Medical Services/Wilderness First Responder Instructor Eric Van Cise only needed to use his emergency medical skills once.

“Years ago I had to help a guy who injured his arm,” Van Cise said. *“We were anchored and I rowed over and constructed a splint from materials on the boat. We got it so they were able to take the guy into town for treatment.”*

The SEARHC EMS department offers a wide range of classes to help train community members in everything from basic first aid to advanced wilderness medicine. Van Cise and his supervisor, Mike Motti, are based in Sitka, but they will go to other SEARHC communities to offer

classes. For example, Van Cise will be in Angoon in February to teach an Emergency Trauma Technician (ETT) class with an Emergency Medical Technician 1 (EMT 1) recertification course. They also work with other trainers who teach classes.

“Due to the remote locations we live in and the delayed transport, our courses give people the tools they need so they can start taking care of the injured person,” Van Cise said. *“We have minimal equipment and long waits in many of our communities, so these classes get more people out there who can provide care.”*

The SEARHC EMS department (966-8771) teaches people how to give cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or use an automatic external

defibrillator (AED), so they can help out if someone is having a heart attack, and they recertify medical providers and community health aides on CPR/AED skills. They also teach people how to teach first aid/CPR, and they can help people earn their credentials in Mariner’s First Aid, Alaska Medevac Certification, ETT and EMT. In addition, SEARHC EMS teaches a range of Wilderness Medical Associates (WMA) courses that provide certification in Wilderness First Aid (WFA), Wilderness Advanced First Aid (WAF), Wilderness First Responder (WFR) and Wilderness EMT.

SEARHC EMS receives statewide requests to teach classes (and sometimes national and international requests to teach WMA classes), but the primary focus is on Southeast Alaska communities. They work with SEARHC programs and departments, public schools, local youth first responder groups, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Alaska Marine Safety Education Association, the Southeast Region EMS Council (SEREMS) and other government groups, local organizations and private interests.

“The more people we can train, the more support we have in the community to work with first responders and community health aides,” Van Cise said. *“The sooner we start care, even at a basic level, usually means we have better outcomes.”* ❀



Daily foot care prevents diabetic complications and amputations

For most people, a cut or blister on the foot is no big thing. But for someone with diabetes a small cut or blister can become a major problem and sometimes result in the amputation of a foot.

According to the National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, high blood glucose (sugar) from diabetes causes two problems that can hurt your feet — nerve damage and poor blood flow.

Nerve damage, also called diabetic neuropathy, means a person with diabetes may not be able to feel pain, heat or cold in the legs and feet. Since you can't feel it, a sore or cut gets worse because you don't know it's there. This can lead to an infection. Besides a loss of feeling, other symptoms of nerve damage include a burning feeling or pain that often is worse at night, numbness or tingling.

People with diabetes also have poor blood flow to the legs and feet, also called peripheral vascular disease (PVD). The poor blood flow makes it hard for a sore or infection to heal. Smoking when you have diabetes can make blood flow problems worse.

Nerve damage and poor blood flow can work together to cause major foot problems. For example, a blister from a pair of poor-fitting shoes can become infected because you don't feel the pain. The blister is slow to heal because of poor blood flow, or it never heals. This can cause gangrene, where the skin and tissue around the

sore die. To keep gangrene from spreading, a doctor may have to cut off a toe, foot or part of a leg.

Luckily, most diabetic foot problems are preventable with regular foot care and good glucose control. Make sure you wash your feet each day and check your feet daily for cuts, sores, blisters, color changes and other problems. If you can't see the bottoms of your feet, use a mirror or have a friend check them. Rub lotion on dry feet (except between the toes), use an emery board or pumice stone to gently file corns and callouses, and keep your toenails clipped. Always wear shoes that fit well to prevent injuries and wear socks to prevent blisters.

If you notice any problems, let your provider know right away. Your provider should do a complete foot exam for nerve damage and blood flow at least once a year, and your provider should check your feet for sores every visit. To learn more about diabetes foot care, ask your provider or diabetes nurse. ❀



Registered Dietitians improve eating habits

Are you overwhelmed with nutrition advice from the TV, magazines and your mother-in-law? Do you want to learn the healthy habits you need to lose weight or control diabetes, cholesterol and high blood pressure? Registered Dietitians (RDs) help you eat healthier foods and avoid scam diets.

Registered dietitians are experts in the science of nutrition. They have completed a bachelor's degree and accredited internship, plus they have to pass a national exam and stay current with nutrition research in order to keep their credentials.

SEARHC dietitians know the truth behind the diet myths, and they can give you solid, practical advice to help you create a personalized nutrition plan. They want to help you meet your goals of living a healthy lifestyle. SEARHC dietitians provide information that is culturally relevant and promotes traditional foods when appropriate.

Call a SEARHC dietitian to get started down the path to feeling and living better. Our RDs welcome all nutrition concerns, and you don't need a special referral from your provider for an appointment. SEARHC has several RDs on staff in Sitka, Juneau, Ketchikan and Klawock, and they visit villages or do telenutrition. ❀

Around the Consortium

Klawock

Dr. Peggy Englebrake, MD, has rejoined the staff at the Alicia Roberts Medical Center and will see patients of all ages. Dr. Englebrake worked at ARMC from 2001-06 and spent the last three years working on the Hopi reservation. She has interest in emergency medicine and in treating diabetes.

Sandra Demmert has been hired as a health educator at the Alicia Roberts Medical Center starting in January. Sandra will spend half of her time as a tobacco cessation counselor, a quarter of her time working on health promotion and a quarter of her time working on tobacco policy issues.

Craig

The SEARHC Community Family Services program has opened an office on the first floor of the Thibodeau Mall in Craig. A formal grand opening takes place from noon to 5 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 14. The office phone numbers are 826-2101 or 826-2102.

Consortium-wide

After five successful years, the SEARHC Steps to a Healthier SE Alaska program closed in December after being honored with an Alaska Community Service Award from the Alaska Public Health Association at its 2009 Alaska Health Summit. The Steps to a Healthier SE Alaska program was part of the national Steps to a Healthier US program, which also closed this year. Over the past five years, the SEARHC Steps program awarded 77 grants worth just over \$1.1 million to fund projects in 12 Southeast Alaska communities. The Steps program worked to increase physical activity opportunities, improve nutrition and reduce the impact of tobacco in the region, while also working to reduce diabetes, obesity and asthma.

Wrangell

SEARHC has hired Health Educator Vivian Mork to work on the Healthy Wrangell Program, which is funded by a three-year grant from the Indian Health Service. Vivian will work on three main focus areas – increasing access to fruits and vegetables, increasing physical activity and increasing the number of people in Wrangell who are protected through policy from secondhand smoke. She will provide technical assistance to several community partners already working on these projects. Vivian's number is 874-2701 and her office is in the SNO Building.

Hydaburg

SEARHC Diabetes Nurse Julie Sturtevant and Dental Health Aide Therapist Daniel Kennedy, both from the Alicia Roberts Medical Center in Klawock, are teaming up to offer diabetes clinics every other Monday at the Hydaburg Health Center. Julie provides diabetic foot exams and provides diabetes education, while Daniel provides annual dental exams for patients with diabetes. The next clinics are Jan. 11 and 25, and Feb. 8 and 22. To schedule an appointment, call the Hydaburg Health Center at 755-4975.

Sitka

Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital dietitian Jennifer Skoog in December earned a Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) credential from the National Certification Board for Diabetes Educators. Jennifer also holds the Registered Dietitian (RD) and Licensed Dietitian (LD) credentials.

Angoon

The SEARHC EMS program will teach an Emergency Trauma Technician (ETT) course with a recertification curriculum for Emergency Medical Technician 1 (EMT 1) on Feb. 21-25 at the Angoon fire hall. The cost is \$75. For more info, call SEARHC EMS Instructor Eric Van Gise at 966-8769 in Sitka.

Patient Tip: Make this a healthy new year

Many people make New Year's resolutions or set goals for the new year. Here are a few simple goals or resolutions for living a healthier living in 2010.

- ◆ **Eat more traditional foods and fewer packaged foods and meats.** Most traditional subsistence foods are healthier for you than processed foods you buy in the store, so add more fish, venison, berries, seaweed and other local foods to your daily diet. For example, fish is an excellent source of Omega 3 fatty acids, which help lower your cholesterol and keep your heart healthy.
- ◆ **Add more fruits and vegetables to your daily diet.** Most Alaskans don't come close to the recommended 5-9 servings of fruit and veggies they should eat each day. Try to eat at least 2 1/2 cups of veggies and 1 or 2 cups of fruit per day. If you don't have fresh fruits and veggies from your garden, you still can eat frozen, canned and dried produce to get the valuable nutrients you need for a healthy heart.
- ◆ **Leave the salt shaker in the cupboard when you set the table.** Many Alaskans eat way too much salt each day, so find ways to reduce your sodium intake. Replace salt with other herbs and spices when you cook, and beware of hidden salt in canned foods and salad dressing.
- ◆ **Find fun ways to add physical activity to your daily routine.** Adults need 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day, while children need 60 minutes. Find ways to add fun physical activities to your life, such as playing basketball, swimming, walking, dancing – even some chores like gardening or vacuuming count. Physical activity helps your heart and gives you endurance, plus it makes your bones and muscles strong.
- ◆ **If you smoke, make this the year you quit tobacco.** Using tobacco raises your risk for heart and lung disease, many types of cancer and several other major health problems. If you smoke, quitting tobacco is the best thing you can do to regain your health. The SEARHC Tobacco program (907-966-8721) can help you quit tobacco by providing you with support and nicotine replacement therapy products (gum, patches, etc.). If you aren't ready to quit, then take your smoke outside so your family and friends don't have to breathe dangerous secondhand smoke.
- ◆ **Take time for yourself each day.** To reduce your stress, find 15-30 minutes of time to relax each day. Reading for pleasure, playing a musical instrument, dancing, meditating or doing yoga are just some of the ways you can reduce your stress. Lower stress levels are good for your heart.