

## Larry Wright changes lifestyle to take control of his diabetes



Two years ago, Larry Wright of Sitka was diagnosed with prediabetes. He took the diagnosis lightly, and last November he was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.

That was Larry's wake-up call. Over the past year, Larry, 54, made simple lifestyle changes that help him control his diabetes. This year, Larry, who is a 6-foot-2 computer tech at SEARHC, lost 60 pounds to go from 287 to 227. His glucose and cholesterol levels also are much improved.

*"I treated the phrase 'prediabetic' lightly," Larry said. "Don't take it lightly, you want to treat it like the real thing. It's a big difference preventing a disease than it is dealing with it. If I'd done these things when I had prediabetes, my (diabetes) diagnosis might never have happened."*

The diagnosis means Larry joined nearly 24 million other Americans with diabetes, and about a quarter of them don't even know they have the disease. Diabetes is a serious health problem for Alaska Natives and American Indians, who are more than twice as likely to have diabetes than whites (Larry is part

Tlingit). If left untreated, diabetes can cause major health issues such as heart disease, stroke, lung problems, kidney disease, blindness, dental problems and foot amputations.

Simple lifestyle changes can prevent or delay diabetes, and the changes are more effective if they happen before a person is diagnosed with diabetes. Since his diabetes diagnosis, Larry started eating breakfasts and cut out the snacks. He started walking with his wife, Julie, and now walks a 2 1/2-mile course in the morning and again at night during the week, plays basketball on Saturday, and does a double-walk on Sunday.

*"It's all diet and exercise," Larry said, adding that he takes no medicine for his diabetes and recently was able to eliminate one of his cholesterol meds. "I saw a heart specialist last November. He told me to walk, because I've got to lose weight. I also can do that for my diabetes."*

Larry said the big reason for his success is the support he gets from his family and from SEARHC dietitians, diabetes educators and doctors. They helped him find a manageable system that works for his lifestyle. To learn more about diabetes, contact your local SEARHC clinic. ❀

## A Message from the President



SEARHC made an 11-year-old dream come true on Nov. 3 when the first patient was housed at our new short-term housing facility across the street from Mt. Edgcumbe Hospital in Sitka.

Building the new short-term housing facility was greatly needed, since so many of our medical procedures now require little or no hospitalization. Our patients needed a place to stay while they waited for their trip home, or a place to heal before heading home. The new facility provides safe, accessible housing for our patients waiting for surgery, our patients waiting for the start of a substance-abuse treatment program, women waiting for the birth of a child and for families of patients in critical care.

The short-term housing facility truly is a community partnership, with funding and other support coming from the Denali Commission, Rasmuson Foundation, Paul G. Allen Foundation, Tlingit-Haida Regional Housing Authority, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, City and Borough of Sitka, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Baranof Island Housing Authority and SEARHC.

One of my first acts as President/CEO of SEARHC was breaking ground for this facility in November 2007, and it is exciting to see this facility finally open and housing patients.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald Helgesen". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Your partner in health

## SEARHC adds naltrexone to substance-abuse treatment options

SEARHC has added the drug naltrexone to its substance-abuse treatment options after this summer's results of a study by the Yale Medical School and SEARHC showed the drug to be effective in rural settings with Alaska Native and non-Native patients.

*"The naltrexone program is still in its infancy here, but we already have seen some really amazing results,"* said Rand West, Psy.D., Mental Health Director at the SEARHC Haa Toowóo Náákw Hít Behavioral Health Clinic in Sitka. *"For some, naltrexone is truly life-saving."*

Dr. Tina Lee, a psychiatrist at Haa Toowóo Náákw Hít, said recent research shows alcoholism is a disease of the brain's reward centers. *"Naltrexone is able to block the cravings for alcohol and to blunt the reward or 'high' that comes from using alcohol,"* Lee said. *"This allows the motivated person to take back control of their decisions and behaviors, with ongoing supports and lifestyle changes."*

There are two ways for patients to be prescribed naltrexone — by going through Haa Toowóo Náákw Hít or by going through the Mt. Edgcumbe Hospital Outpatient Department or their regular medical provider in Sitka. The Juneau Behavioral Health Department and Ethel Lund Medical Center expect to be ready to prescribe naltrexone starting in December. SEARHC hopes to expand the program to other clinics in the future, depending on whether there is a local provider able to support the treatment. Patients need to be alcohol-free for at least four days before starting naltrexone, and there are some cases (such as too much liver damage or conflicts with other drugs) when naltrexone will not be prescribed. All patients using naltrexone will have to attend regular follow-up appointments.

*"My goal is to allow this treatment to be more accessible to clients that might choose to try it,"* said Kathy Kahler, a nurse practitioner who will oversee naltrexone use at the hospital's Outpatient Department. *"This accessibility is enhanced by making it available in the primary care setting."*

*"Studies show that frequent, respectful contact is very important to help people overcome addictions,"* said Chris Anglin, a behavioral health nurse with Haa Toowóo Náákw Hít. *"Frequent appointments are an important part of this treatment. Patients will not be able to continue to get their naltrexone if they do not attend appointments. However, if someone drops out of treatment, they will be welcomed back when they are ready. We would like this to be inclusive and will actively work to help people have access to this care."* ❀

# Front Street Clinic celebrates five years of service to Juneau's homeless



Juneau's homeless may have a hard time finding a place to stay each night or a good healthy meal. But for the past five years they've had a home for health care in the SEARHC Front Street Clinic.

The Front Street Clinic, located in the Miner's Mercantile Building in downtown Juneau, 225 Front St., Suite 202, opened its doors in September 2003 after SEARHC received a federal grant. All patients must meet homeless eligibility criteria to use the clinic.

*"We have people who are living in tents or cars, are couch-surfing, living in culverts, under buildings and in shelters,"* said Gail Tharpe-Lucero, a physician assistant who said the clinic has a caseload of about 600 different patients, both Native and non-Native.

*"We're a small clinic and our funds are limited, but our services are life-saving."*

Gail said many of the patients need medicines and monitoring for health issues, including diabetes, heart disorders, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and hepatitis C. Many patients need wound care or diabetic foot care, and a lot of them have been through some type of trauma. Lee Wachman is the nurse case manager at Front Street Clinic, and a dentist and dental hygienist also provide services. Mental health therapy services will be added soon.

*"Most of our patients want to learn how to take care of themselves,"* Gail said. *"A lot of them don't come for piddly things. They come because they need help understanding their illness."*

While the clinic does deal with its share of chronic inebriates and people with mental illnesses, many of the patients never thought they'd ever be homeless. For example, Gail said one young woman came to Juneau because she was offered a tourism job, but wasn't hired because she was 18 and she needed to be 21. The company didn't offer to send her back to the Lower 48, and the woman ended up homeless. Gail said many patients have similar stories.

*"We have a lot of people who came from the villages,"* Gail said. *"We have people living in tents who work every day and make minimum wage, but can't afford housing. We have people who can only get seasonal work. We do sign people up for a sliding fee, but we don't turn away anyone who's homeless."*

To help patients get other services they need, such as shelter, food and clothes, Front Street Clinic works with several other Juneau agencies, such as the Glory Hole, St. Vincent de Paul, AWARE, Gastineau Human Services and the Juneau Alliance for Mental Health. The clinic also held a drive last winter to get donations for patients of warm socks, insulated gloves, winter hats, Thermacare heat wraps and gift cards to purchase these items (larger items such as clean used coats should go to the Glory Hole).

*"The clinic is such an incredible service,"* Gail said. *"I measure success by if they (the patients) feel better about themselves and we were able to respect their dignity."* ❀

## Fun is key in new physical activity guidelines



*“Just get moving and have fun doing it”* was the main message of the new physical activity guidelines released last month by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The new guidelines list basic recommendations of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a day,

five days a week for adults (including seniors) and an hour of activity a day for children ages 6-18. The new guidelines also encourage people to find fun physical activities they enjoy, and not to worry about going to the gym. They also say it’s OK to get physical activity in small 10- or 15-minute segments if people can’t find a 30-minute or hour-long block of time.

The list of acceptable activities includes biking, swimming, hiking, climbing the monkey bars, playing softball, yoga, dancing and many other activities, including doing household chores or raking leaves. The key is for people to find healthy activities they enjoy doing, so they become more active. The more active we are, the healthier we will be.

SEARHC Community Health Services Medical Director Dr. David Vastola said poor diet and sedentary lifestyles are the primary causes of obesity and other diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and even some forms of cancer. Being more active can prevent many of these chronic diseases.

*“The new 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans were designed to address this need,”* Dr. Vastola said. *“Small consistent changes in activity level and diet can produce dramatic health benefits over time. While it is worth reading the guidelines, my advice is to be active, eat sensibly and have fun.”*

To read more about the new guidelines, go to:

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/>

## Programs help patients save money

Many SEARHC patients qualify for alternate health care resources, such as Denali KidCare, Medicare, Medicaid, veteran benefits and private insurance. By signing up for these programs, patients can save money on medical services they may have to obtain outside of SEARHC.

Nellie Kookesh is the Health Resource Outreach Coordinator for all SEARHC sites, and her job is to help patients enroll in these programs. Currently the Indian Health Service funds less than half of SEARHC’s budget, so being able to tap into these alternate resources also means the consortium can provide more services or use the money for infrastructure, such as hiring a new pediatrician, bringing in more specialty clinics, buying a new MRI machine or upgrading a clinic. It’s a win-win situation.

*“By enrolling in insurance programs like Medicaid, Medicare, HRSA or private insurance, these resources help patients by improving access to services,”* Nellie said.

In addition to signing patients up for health care insurance programs, Nellie also can help patients apply and interview for public assistance programs such as food stamps. She is based in Sitka, but plans future trips to all SEARHC sites, including Yakutat, Hoonah, Wrangell and Petersburg, to recruit and enroll families for these programs. For more info, contact Nellie at 966-8814 or [nellie.kookesh@searhc.org](mailto:nellie.kookesh@searhc.org). ❀

## Around the Consortium

### **Consortium-wide**

The SEARHC Safety Shops will be selling the new Nike Air Native N7 athletic shoes that are specially designed to match a Native foot (wider in the toe, narrower in the heel). Nike donates some profits from sale of this shoe style to the "Let Me Play" program promoting healthy lifestyles in Native American lands. A few demo pairs will be available for trying on in Angoon (Doreen McCluskey, 788-4637), Kake (Georgie Reese, 785-7190), Klawock (June May, 755-4800) and Sitka (Breanne Erickson, 966-8804), but the shoes are available to people from all communities. The shoes sell for the wholesale cost of \$50 per pair, plus shipping, and there are no returns.

### **Wrangell, Kake**

The WISEFAMILIES Through Customary and Traditional Living program is expanding to Wrangell and Kake. The WISEFAMILIES started as a partnership between the Chilkat Indian Village's Klukwan Traditional Knowledge Camp and the SEARHC WISEWOMAN cardiovascular health program, and the new programs in Wrangell and

Kake will be modeled after the successful Klukwan program. A new part-time health advocate is being hired to run the program in Wrangell and SEARHC Community Wellness Advocate Georgie Reese will run the program in Kake, both in partnership with local tribal groups.

### **Haines**

The Chilkoot Indian Association received a five-year, \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice for behavioral prevention services that impact youth risk factors for delinquency. The tribe will work with the SEARHC Behavioral Prevention Department in Haines and other community partners to improve school attendance, increase youth involvement in cultural events and to reduce alcohol and drug use among youth. For information, contact CIA Tribal Administrator Greg Stuckey at 766-2323.

The North Tide Dancers, an alcohol- and drug-free dance group supported by SEARHC, meets twice a week at the home of Wayne and Cherri Price. The dance group promotes healing and recovery through drums, song and dance. It is led by Tim Ackerman, Tommy "T.J." Jimmie and Wayne Price. For info, contact SEARHC Behavioral Health Prevention Specialist Cherri Price at 766-6336.

### **Sitka, Juneau**

The SEARHC Diabetes Program in Sitka and Juneau are the only two programs in the state to earn recognition

from the Indian Health Service as Integrated Diabetes Education Recognition Programs (IDERP). IDERP recognition means the programs follow national standards for diabetes self-management education. The program targets people who are newly diagnosed with diabetes, those who have not received education, and those people with diabetes who are motivated to learn more about how to manage the disease. For info, contact Diabetes Nurse Jennifer Henderson at 966-8595.

### **Sitka**

Sitka students started eating healthier school lunches on Nov. 3, thanks to new menus coming out of a partnership from the Sitka School District, its food vendor NMS (a division of NANA Management Services) and the SEARHC Steps to a Healthier SE Alaska program. The new menus emphasize healthier choices, such as more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, lower fat and sodium levels, using Romaine or leaf lettuce over iceberg and fewer processed foods.

SEARHC Community Health Services Assistant Medical Director Steve Gage in October won the Physician Assistant of the Year Award from the Alaska Academy of Physician Assistants.

The SEARHC Air Medical Service presented merit awards to Greg Raschick, Thor Christianson and Gregory Wong for their service as on-call flight medics.

## Patient Tip: How can you avoid catching the flu?

Flu season is coming, but there are many ways you can reduce your risk. While there's no way to ensure you won't catch the flu, practicing these healthy habits will reduce the spread of influenza and many other diseases this winter.

- ◆ **Wash your hands often with soap and water** – To make sure you wash them long enough, quietly sing through the ABC song while making sure you get between each finger and the backs of the hands.
- ◆ **Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water aren't available** – Many companies now make pocket-sized bottles of sanitizer, which are nice for keeping in your desk, backpack or purse. Also, computer keyboards and phones are places where flu germs collect, so keep sanitary wipes handy to give them periodic cleans.
- ◆ **Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze** – Never cough in the direction of someone. Instead, turn your head and cough or sneeze into a tissue (which immediately is thrown away) or cough into the inside of your elbow (and not into your hand). Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer after you cough or sneeze.
- ◆ **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth** – You want to avoid putting the flu virus where an infection can begin.
- ◆ **Stay home if you feel ill** – If you have flu symptoms (such as fever, body aches and cough), stay home from work or school and avoid public activities. You should stay home at least five days (seven for children) to prevent spreading the disease to others.
- ◆ **Get an annual flu shot** – This especially is important if you are at high risk for severe illness, hospitalization or death from influenza. High-risk people include those age 50 or older, pregnant women, all children age 6 months through 18 years old and people with chronic health conditions that require regular medical care throughout the year. Health care workers and people who work or live with high-risk people also are encouraged to get an annual flu shot. Contact your local SEARHC clinic to schedule a flu shot.



# Have a Safe & Happy Holiday Season

Find it @ [www.searhc.org](http://www.searhc.org)

**The Yéil Jeeyáx Raven's Way youth residential substance abuse treatment program treats Alaska youth ages 13-18 and ranks as one of the most successful youth treatment programs in the Indian Health Service system.**

Raven's Way uses the most effective approaches, providing residential care and treatment for adolescents with substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. This nationally accredited program combines conventional treatment, adventure-based therapy and Native cultural activities to help steer our youth back onto the right path.

The Raven's Way program was cited as a "Best Practice" treatment provider at the Alaska Native Best Practices Conference (May 2005, Anchorage) and at the International Seminar on Youth Substance Abuse (May 2005, Whitehorse).

To learn more about the Raven's Way program, go to <http://www.searhc.org/ravensway/>.

HealthBeat is produced every two months by the SEARHC Corporate Communications department. To be added or removed from our mailing list, or to offer comments or questions, please contact the Corporate Communications office at 907-463-6666.

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