On a Thursday afternoon in mid-April, the wood shop at Aniguiin School in Elim overflowed with 20 lively middle school students, working side-by-side as they filed down foot-long pieces of lumber.

The room filled with the sound of busy hands, the grinding wood creating a swooshing beat and an atmosphere not unlike that of an industrious beehive.

The youth were making ice fishing jigs to allow them to catch food for their families this spring.

“We’re a strong people, we’re a happy people, we can do this. We are so capable of living happy, healthy, thriving lifestyles.”

It was just one of several activities that Norton Sound Health Corporation’s Iñua Program and the Kawerak Wellness Program worked together to bring to Elim April 11-15, carrying a message of suicide prevention among young people.

The sister programs worked with over 100 students, holding talking circles and sharing stories during the school day. The community celebrated with an evening of frybread tacos and Native dancing.

It wasn’t the first time sixth-grader Mariah Daniels had made a fishing jig. Last year, she used her own homemade jig to catch tomcod upriver.

“It’s fun, and it’s part of our culture, too,” Mariah said.

Her older cousin, eighth-grader Katya Daniels, said being able to blend their subsistence lifestyle with school makes them feel more engaged.

“It means a lot. It’s fun and exciting, and we’re always happy to do it,” the older Daniels said.

One of the event’s organizers, Mariah Daniels had made a fishing jig.  

Traditional crafting heals, inspires, unites

BHS art-based courses teach skills, promote wellness

When summer construction jobs dwindle and the sun begins to hibernate, you can find Benjamin Jack indoors, creating one-of-a-kind carvings from ivory, bone, or antlers. An indigenous artist raised in Stebbins, Ben Jack grew up surrounded by a rich culture of singing, dancing, and art. At a young age he understood the importance of preserving his culture and chose to carry on the tradition of sharing knowledge about his roots and of carving.

At 14, Jack began designing art when two bilingual teachers sparked his creativity in their classroom. "Roseanna Dan Waghiyi and Rita Johnson were my inspiration to carve, after teaching me how to make a manaq (fishing rod),” he said. Over time, he learned more about carving and how to integrate his traditional values into his artwork.

This instilled in him a passion to continue to preserve and teach his culture. When he heard about the art-based courses offered through Behavioral Health Services, he began teaching as the carving instructor.

“This program is beneficial to our community members and greatly appreciated for those who want to participate and learn how to carve,” he said. “This is important to me, to keep our traditional values strong.”

For Jack, carving became a safe-guard from negativity and old habits. “It keeps me relaxed, motivated, keeps my imagination imagining, positive thinking and busy,” he explained. It has also helped him keep his sobriety strong.

Rabid dog endangers residents

It was a cold day in the middle of March when Christopher Noongwook, a dental assistant at the time, noticed a small brown husky curled up outside the Gambell clinic. Noongwook, who loves animals, could not resist spending time with the dog. He brought it some treats and shared cuddles before heading back to work.

When the dog was still there after lunch, Noongwook began to worry. What would later prove a serious cause for worry, however, never entered his mind: that the dog carried rabies.

“At this point, I was asking other people whose pup it was, and they all didn’t know. I went back to work, hoping it was one of the health aides’ patients’ dog,” Noongwook said.

An instant connection sparked between the two, and those tiny dog ears would perk up when Noongwook visited on breaks from work. He knew he had to help the dog. He tried to find the owners after work, but it soon became clear that the dog was a stray.

Jill Campbell, Gambell clinic manager and volunteer for non-profit organization PAWS of Nome, helped organize a temporary foster home for the dog. She also got the dog up-to-date on his vaccinations and found the owners after work, but it soon became clear that the dog was a stray.

“Rabid dog endangers residents” Please turn to page 12

Look inside!

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Though uncomfortable, women’s health screenings critical page 7
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So many scholarships! pages 10-11
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And much more ...
The Norton Sound Health Corporation Board of Directors and administration are grateful for our dedicated staff, and humbled by their resiliency during the pandemic. NSHC commends all community leaders and partners for keeping the region safe.

We have all faced loss in some way. NSHC extends prayers and condolences to the families who have lost loved ones. The past two and a half years have challenged us as a community, but have also inspired us to never give up. We have adapted to changes in how we live and work, and we've accepted COVID-19 as a reality.

As we climb out of this pandemic phase, NSHC looks forward to achieving some strategic goals to continue our legacy as a leader in tribal health.

For fiscal year 2022, the NSHC board approved a $227 million operating budget. This is a significant increase from the $75 million annual budget of ten years ago.

Although some of this year’s operating revenue comes from one-time supplemental COVID-19 funding awards, the majority of NSHC’s revenue growth can be attributed to the expansion of health care services. Over the past decade, NSHC has expanded health care visits in the region from 85,000 to 152,000 overall encounters. Cash collections from third-party payers has increased as a result. It is this strong business model that allows NSHC to provide high quality health care services and keep growing.

We have developed from this job amazing. I can now create the right appeal to any paying customer or patient that walks in the door. Consider joining the NSHC place to work! It is a great place to work!

What’s next for Willis Pate IV?

Willis Pate IV discovered creativity in the kitchen.

Willis Pate IV grew up in Nome before moving to Kenai in 2010. He moved back to Nome in 2017 and shortly thereafter took on his first-ever kitchen job at Norton Sound Health Corporation. This is an interview with him on his experience as a food service worker.

Can you describe the role of a food service worker?

On a daily basis, I prep for patient meals in the morning; switch over to salad bar; put away freezer, dry or chill freight; be a backup cashier; fill out requisitions; and do dishes if need be. All of these skills are important to a food service worker.

Do you have memorable moments to share?

The notable days to remember are doing all the catering parties for the holidays with QCC. I had to make blueberry delight from scratch for the big party, along with other desserts to go with it. Another time, I had to prep desserts for all the village clinics with a few days’ notice. That shows the skill you can develop working in a kitchen: being able to create or prep foods and complete them in a timely fashion.

What skills have you found vital to your job?

The skills I developed from this job are amazing. I can now cook or bake something from scratch and know that people will enjoy it. These skills can also make you the popular person at the party, as I found out.

What is the best part about your job?

The best part of my job is being creative with the food and watching people enjoy what I create. An example of creativity at work is designing the salad bar. Utilizing the different color contrasts of the veggies and special salads can create the right appeal to any paying customer or patient staying at our hospital.

What advice do you have for someone new to the industry?

My advice for anyone who is considering kitchen work is to try it out. When I started, I actually applied just looking for a job and not realizing I would enjoy the work. I worked my way up to kitchen supervisor, but chose to stay as a food service worker because it’s a job I enjoy most.

NSHC looks ahead

As COVID recedes, NSHC looks ahead to continued expansion of health care services and keep growing.
Dental team going strong, marks over 40 years of care

NSHC’s Dental Department leadership may have changed hands earlier this year for the first time in 10 years, but the goal of providing quality dental care in the region remains the same. In January, Dr. Mark Kelso, who has been working at NSHC since 1986, handed over the reins of department directorship to Dr. Sarah Luce.

Luce has worked for NSHC dental since 2012, the same year she graduated from the University of Maryland School of Dentistry. She has since put down roots in Nome with a family and has made dozens of trips to the region’s communities to provide dental care.

Kelso continues to work at NSHC as a staff dentist. He has been a strong supporter of the Dental Health Aide Therapy Program and its positive impacts on small communities where the DHAs are located. He has made countless visits to the region’s villages, where he has made many friends and an overwhelming difference in oral health.

**Department began with preventive program run by health aides**

NSHC has been grateful for such a smooth transition between two great directors in the dental department, which consists of 18 permanent staff members: five dentists, nine dental assistants, two DHAs, one office manager, and one administrative assistant. Luce attributes the department’s successes to her team’s expertise in the field of dentistry, with over 175 years of combined experience. Each staff member contributes their skills to provide the best patient care possible.

“From the first point of contact is most often our receptionist, Pauline Marble. She is professional—a great communicator with a refreshing, joyful attitude,” Luce said. “She welcomes all patients, new and old, leaving with a positive last impression.”

NSHC’s five full-time dentists each spend about 10 weeks per year traveling to villages to offer dental clinics, in addition to three itinerant dentists who travel to the region to provide care in the villages. There are also two teams of pediatric dentists who travel to the region several times a year to provide specialized care for children.

The regional dental program originally began as a preventive education program taught by health aides and became its own department in 1980. There were then three NSHC dentists at that time, all members of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. In 1986, Dr. Brian Thomas Simuklet and dental assistant Velma Jean Schluckebier died in an airplane crash en route to a village clinic. Later that year, Kelso joined the team.

“The department has expanded since then. More dentists were added to better address the regional need and increase in services provided,” Kelso said. “The tribal dental care has morphed from just basic extractions in its initial iteration to a full spectrum of dental services today.”

**Challenges of mobile care**

One of the newest additions to the dental department is Dr. Joe Sem, who has been working at NSHC for three years. When Sem first visited Alaska as a teenager he quickly fell in love with the expansive wilderness the state has to offer. Living in Minnesota at the time, a young Sem was inspired to return to Alaska one day, and years later made it his goal to provide health services in remote Alaska communities. And that is exactly what he has been doing for the past three years in the Norton Sound/Bering Strait region. So far, he has offered dental clinics in Teller, Shishmaref, Elim, Little Diomede, Stebbins, and Savoonga in addition to his regular work in Nome.

“The idea of being able to live here and help people out in a tangible way, like providing dentistry, lit a fire in me—and now, here I am!” he said, reminiscing on those first visits to Alaska. “I enjoy the challenges of mobile dentistry and the ‘adventure’ of flying to remote villages to serve. I get to do dentistry in a way that few dentists in the U.S. can experience, which I am grateful for.”

Along with dentists, dental assistants also travel to the villages to help with procedures.

“There is a lot to learn to become a proficient dental assistant, and then adapting that to mobile dentistry in a village is a whole new learning curve,” Sem said. “We are fortunate to have that year, Kelso joined the team.

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**Education Program, aspiring DHAs work under a supervising dentist for three months. Upon completion of this preceptorship, trainees receive a certification that allows them to practice much needed dental care in rural communities, working under the direction of a licensed dentist. Their scope of practice includes preventative care and education, cleanings, emergencies, and basic restorations such as sealants, fillings, and uncomplicated extractions.

“Care deeply for my patients”

Growing up in the village of Noorvik, where dental professionals only traveled occasionally, Johnson remembers waiting in line for an exam or to have cavities filled. Now a resident of Nome-based NSHC Dental Department staff recently gathered for a group photo. Front row, from left: Pauline Marble, Sharon Lock, Dr. Sarah Luce, Precious Nichols, and Kaylee Kakoona. Back, from left: Abigail Crockett, Dr. Erin Medina, Jana Scheurch, Dr. Joseph Sem, Dr. Mark Kelso, Zenas Pratt, Michelle Tall.

Dr. Erin Medina and dental assistant Abigail Crocket take a quick break while preparing for a dental clinic in Brevig Mission in January 2022.

After successfully completing the two-year long Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program, aspiring DHAs work under a supervising dentist for three months. Upon completion of this preceptorship, trainees receive a certification that allows them to practice much needed dental care in rural communities, working under the direction of a licensed dentist. Their scope of practice includes preventative care and education, cleanings, emergencies, and basic restorations such as sealants, fillings, and uncomplicated extractions.

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Dr. Erin Medina and dental assistant Abigail Crocket take a quick break while preparing for a dental clinic in Brevig Mission in January 2022.
New program lifts the bar for better fitness

Community members spring into action

With a quickly growing group fitness program, health goals no longer have to be achieved all on your own. Last fall, Norton Sound Health Corporation’s Wellness Program chose six individuals to enroll in a grant-funded community fitness certification program. The aspiring fitness instructors include Nicole Mertz, Tracy Gregg, Leah Anderson, Brodie Kimmel, Katie Fry, and Stephanie Stang. Through the program, they learned practical skills and gained hands-on experience to inspire and motivate people to live happier and healthier lives.

Soon, they will begin offering classes such as spin, circuit training, yoga, HIIT, Strong Nation, recovery and stress relief stretching, strength building with resistance bands, express cardio classes, and trampoline fitness. All will be offered free of charge for at least one year at accessible locations in Nome. The classes are expected to begin in June and will welcome people of all fitness levels.

Nicole Santonastaso, NSHC Prevention Program supervisor, has been working toward making this program happen in order to bring more fitness opportunities to Nome. These classes will help build community and accountability in fitness and health.

“We promise a lot of fun, sweat, and a safe and accepting environment.”

“I am excited to start this program in order to bring more fitness opportunities to Nome. These classes will help build community and accountability in fitness and health. We promise a lot of fun, sweat, and a safe and accepting environment.”

Nicole Santonastaso, NSHC Prevention Program supervisor.
Duck Curry

This recipe is meant to be served over a carbohydrate of your choice. Our favorite is rice!

INGREDIENTS
▶ 2 pounds duck meat
▶ 2 tablespoons oil
▶ ½ cup fresh basil
▶ 2 tablespoons minced garlic
▶ 2 green onions
▶ 1 tablespoon salt
▶ 2 tablespoons soy sauce
▶ 1 teaspoon red curry paste
▶ 2 tablespoons sugar

INGREDIENTS FOR THE CURRY
▶ 1 onion
▶ 2 tablespoons minced garlic
▶ 2 teaspoons red curry paste
▶ 2 cans coconut milk
▶ 3 tablespoons lime juice
▶ 1 tablespoon sugar
▶ 1 tablespoon soy sauce
▶ ½ teaspoon salt
▶ Choice of vegetables
▶ Optional basil, cilantro and chili flakes

DIRECTIONS
1. Before you begin, wash your hands.
2. In a skillet, heat the oil over medium until glistening. Brown the meat until cooked. Remove the meat from the pan and set aside.
3. Place the basil, garlic, onions, and salt in skillet. Heat for 2-3 minutes. Add in the soy sauce, curry paste and sugar. Stir to combine.
4. Add the meat back into the pan and mix with the other ingredients.
5. Remove the duck mixture from the pan and set aside in a bowl.
6. Place chopped onion and other vegetables of choice into skillet and heat for about 5 minutes or until softened. Add the garlic and stir for about a minute before adding curry paste and coconut milk. Stir until fully incorporated and smooth.
7. Add lime juice, soy sauce, sugar and salt and stir to combine. Bring to a boil, then add the duck mixture back in.
8. Turn the heat to low and simmer, covered, until the sauce starts to thicken. This should take about 20 minutes. Serve over rice or your favorite carb. Sprinkle with cilantro and/or crushed red pepper flakes for extra flavor.

ADDITIONAL NOTES
▶ Feel free to replace the fresh basil or minced garlic with whatever version is available to you. Dried basil works just as well.
▶ If you do not have curry paste, you can use curry powder. Generally substitute 1 teaspoon curry powder for 1 tablespoon paste.
▶ If you do not have coconut milk, you can use whatever milk is available to you. If you like coconut milk but it is not carried at your store, you might ask your store manager to order it.
▶ Made this recipe? Be sure to send pictures to wellness@nshcorp.org

Successful hunters
Above left: Landyn “Alagnaq” Nassuk, 11, proudly poses with his catch of brant goose at Safety Sound in spring 2022. Above right: Ty Peterson, 5, collects his pintail duck catch from a fall hunting trip with his dad. Ty dresses warmly for fall hunts, ready to spend time outside in a duck blind in chilly weather. Avian influenza has been detected in Alaska this spring, and wild birds can be carriers of the virus. Turn to page 7 for more information on how to handle harvested birds safely and where to report your observations of sick birds.
Health aide trainer fights for Ukraine

Mark Hayward back in Nome after training Ukrainian soldiers

Normally one might find Mark Hayward, a physician assistant and trainer in Norton Sound Health Corporation’s Village Health Services department, in either a classroom or clinic setting, helping regional community health aides brush up on their medical skills.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, he traveled in response to village outbreaks to help test community members and administer vaccinations. At home in Nome, he spends time with his cats and hunts for beach glass.

But this spring, Hayward found himself in Ukraine. He traveled to the besieged country to help in its fight against Russia. Horrified by the Russian invasion and inspired by the will of the Ukrainian people, Hayward applied for service with the Ukrainian Foreign Legion.

What might seem to some like a long leap—from training regional healthcare professionals to rushing to serve in a foreign war—is not out of character for Hayward, according to his wife, Cammie Hayward, a nurse in Nome’s Primary Care Clinic.

“Oh, you know Mark. It’s what he does,” Cammie offered in explanation.

From army medic to health aide trainer to the war in Ukraine

Hayward started working for NSHC in June 2018. In his past, he served as a U.S. Army Special Forces medic and trainer. He is a life member of the Special Operations Medical Association and a founding member of Team Rubicon, a non-profit organization that connects military veterans and first responders to areas in need.

Hayward feels at home at NSHC and has a great passion for his current role. He likens community health aides to Special Forces medics, as both are frontline medical professionals. He has a great respect for their ability to serve their communities like no one else can.

However, in February, shortly after Russia invaded its neighbor Ukraine, Hayward felt that old calling to help once again. He felt the calling strongest from the front lines.

“My response, at this unique and very particular moment in history, is to not rush to the aid of the wounded who are under artillery bombardment,” Hayward wrote in a social media post, explaining his whereabouts to friends. “My response, in this case, is to move with all due haste as directly as I can, to stop those artillery units from firing any more shells.”

In early March, Hayward submitted his paperwork to the Ukrainian embassy in Washington, D.C., declaring his intent to formally enlist with the Ukrainian Foreign Legion.

Polish citizens cheer him on

When he arrived in Poland, Hayward procured an ambulance that would allow him to travel into Ukraine. Eager to help their neighbors, Polish citizens filled the ambulance with supplies for medical aid. Hayward crossed the border, buoyed by their support.

Once in Ukraine, however, he was slowed down on his quest to join the front lines by Russian missile strikes.

Hayward fashioned a rechargeable battery that lasted only a few hours.

Hayward and his friend studied up on Javelins and began teaching troops how to use them. To combat the battery issue, Hayward fashioned a rechargeable solution using motorcycle batteries, alligator clips, and a wiring harness from a broken computer. Engineers took his model and refined it for further use.

The tinkering allowed for more training on the weapon, which resulted in more successful use of the missiles. Soon the American pair were sought after for Javelin training by an army unit in the more eastern city of Zaporizhzhia, even closer to the enemy. They trained soldiers there and worked with Ukrainians to repair Javelin launchers damaged in fighting, at one point taking apart a broken $100,000 command launch unit with a pocket screwdriver. That launcher is now back in action.

As Hayward experienced close calls with mortar fire from Russian forces, he relayed messages to friends and family members. Supporters shared his messages on his social media accounts, which included censures for the U.S.’s failure to act to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine and condemnations of the Russian Army’s evident war crimes.

Returning home to Nome

Even as Hayward made notable differences in the fight against Russia, he felt volunteer service was not an adequate answer for the Ukrainian military’s needs.

At the end of April, Hayward and his Texas friend gave an interview to the Wall Street Journal on the need for more U.S. training resources for Ukrainian troops. The article became the impetus for the duo to return to the U.S. when it became apparent it may have made them special targets of the Russian Army.

On his return, Hayward stopped in Washington, D.C., to sound the alarm on the need for support for Ukraine. He met with U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski and her staff, who he said shared his concern for needed training resources. He continues to try to relay his findings and knowledge to Department of Defense personnel who could move the needle on providing support for Ukraine.

Back home in Nome, Hayward tries to adjust to his normal life again. While away, friends and supporters raised money for the Haywards so that they could return home. He has expressed his gratitude for all the support and prayers.

In a letter he wrote to President Biden, the U.S. Secretary of State, and other powerful dignitaries, Hayward appealed for an open ear so that the group of volunteers Hayward served with could share their knowledge.

"Most of us are veterans, and we are hectically sick of war," he wrote. “But some wars must be fought, and some risks are worth taking. This war, and Russian genocide against Ukraine, must be answered.”
Women’s health screenings are a mixed bag.

For many, the intimate encounters with health care providers in sterile settings can be unsettling. Yet the screenings are critical because they can catch cancers in the earliest stages, when they can often be successfully treated.

To prevent common forms of cancer, women should receive cervical cancer screenings and breast cancer screenings regularly. NSHC offers Pap smears starting when women turn 21 years old, and mammograms around the time women turn 40, depending on their health histories.

NSHC has made women’s health screenings a priority in order to combat high rates of cervical and breast cancer in the region. After a woman’s first Pap smear, she is reminded annually to return every three years throughout her 20s and every five years once she hits 30. Similarly, after a woman’s first screening mammogram, she is reminded annually to return for another.

The first time can be the hardest.

“It’s easy enough to get women to come back for their regular screenings,” said Megan Mackiernan, physician assistant and director of Quality Improvement and Risk Management at NSHC. “But the hard part is getting them to come in the first place.”

There are many reasons women may hesitate to come in for screenings.

Valerie Dull, a contract mammographer at NSHC, says some of her patients worry about breast compression during the exam and are uncomfortable about showing their bodies.

“I always hope that my patients know that I am a mother and care about women’s health, and my job is to make sure we’re all healthy,” Dull said.

“Most mammographers have their reasons for becoming a women’s imaging technologist. Often times, this is because of their own life experiences, like having a loved one that has been lost to breast cancer.”

Preparing for a mammogram

Dull says women can prepare for an exam by knowing their medical history, including their family history of breast and cervical cancer, history of breast and reproductive surgeries, and what hormonal medications they’ve taken or are taking.

Women should expect to remove their clothing from the waist up and change into a mammography cape. A technologist will usually take four X-ray pictures from different angles but can take more if needed.

Mackiernan has firsthand experience of the awkwardness of getting a mammogram. She recommends letting the technologist know how one is feeling and when and if they need to take a break.

“Mammograms are so valuable in their ability to identify even very small areas of concern early, when they are most easily treated,” Mackiernan said.

According to Dr. Angela Torres, NSHC’s lead obstetrics doctor, cervical cancer screenings, or Pap smears, can make women feel uncomfortable and even anxious.

Usually, women are asked to change into a patient gown, be seated on the reclined exam chair, and place their heels into elevated stirrups. This gives the medical provider a better angle to complete the examination—but can be awkward for patients.

“It really takes a lot of control away from you,” Torres explained. “You’re in a very vulnerable place.”

Physicians usually have strategies to make the experience less scary.

“If they haven’t had one in a while or if they’ve never had one, I’ll talk them through the whole process,” Torres said.

She gives her patients an overview of what she will do and offers to position them in a way that allows them to see what’s going on if they’re curious. She gives women options to help make them as comfortable as possible.

Sexual trauma survivor shares tips for getting through a Pap smear

Sexual trauma survivors may find it extremely difficult to undergo a Pap smear.

“For me, it’s a vicious cycle,” said one woman who had experienced sexual trauma. “I’m nervous that it’s going to be painful, then it’s painful because I’m so tense and nervous.”

Torres knows well the role sexual trauma plays in exams. She has found that talking a patient through each step of the exam can be calming. She values patient feedback and wants the patient to be the driver in the exam room.

Though it may be difficult, Torres suggests sexual trauma survivors find a way to tell their doctor if they are having a hard time.

Some suggestions Torres has for patients to voice to their physicians are:

▶ “I’m not really good at having my legs apart.”
▶ “Lastly, it’s important to know you can request a female (or male) provider for your Pap smear. Since my assaults were perpetrated by men, I’m more comfortable with female providers.”

Cancers a real risk for many

In spite of the awkwardness, the benefits of a Pap smear are clear.

“We know what causes cervical cancer, and that’s HPV,” said Torres.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection, and more than 80% of sexually active men and women will or have will it. Most HPV infections clear up on their own, but certain genotypes put women at risk of developing cervical cancer.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “HPV is so common that almost every sexually active person will get HPV at some point if they don’t get vaccinated.”

HPV vaccines are recommended for all preteens at age 11 or 12, or for every one through age 26 if they have not yet been vaccinated.

“There’s a good chance you can get cervical cancer if you’ve ever had sex,” Torres said. But the good news is, if a Pap smear detects no cervical cancer, patients don’t have to come back for three or five years.
Dedicated to making a difference
Long-term NSHC staff reflect on changes, memories

Norton Sound Health Corporation turned 50 years old in November 2020. The anniversary passed without much fanfare due to the pandemic, but the milestone was noteworthy. What made the five decades of service and growth possible? NSHC’s dedicated workforce played a large role. Many employees have been with the organization for decades—in some cases, for most of NSHC’s existence—and have witnessed the juxtaposition of dramatic change alongside enduring priorities.

Their memories tell the story of NSHC’s impact on healthcare and wellness in the region.

MARK KELSO
Started: August 1986 as a staff dentist
Now: Staff dentist
Other roles: Dental director
On improvements: “As far as dental care goes, there are now programs in place to treat children before their dental disease becomes acute. The dental program has moved from being a predominately emergency dental care facility to proactively addressing the disease overall. Our orthodontic program did not use to exist and now is highly valued by many patients. It is refreshing to see an emerging subset of young adult patients who desire healthy teeth for life and take an active role in their oral health care.”
On the best part: “The ability to treat patients and get to know them—now several generations worth.”
On what he’s known for: “I always enjoy snow-machining to Golovin and White Mountain to work. For the few times that I have flown, I am asked multiple times every day why I didn’t ride my machine over. It has become an expectation of sorts.”

MARTINA LEEDY
Started: June 1984 in Housekeeping
Now: Senior medical supply specialist
Other roles: Sterile processing, purchasing
On changes: “When I first started in Materials Management, I was happy I knew how to type! We had no fax machines, so we had to use a phone to take orders of course. We took orders from the village clinics on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It started to speed things up when we got a fax machine. And now today, it’s every day: village orders. And they have to be hand carried on the airlines, whereas we had to mail them before. It’s faster, that way they can get their stuff now.”

SOLOMON BOOSHU
Started: 1993 as a Domestic Services housekeeper
Now: Finance accounts payable technician
Other roles: Radiology reception (in 1986 before a break), maintenance technician
On getting started: “In 1993 I worked under Eric Baxter and he pushed me to further my education at Northwest Campus. I started taking accounting courses and applied for an accounting position in 1994. I did not get an interview originally. A few months passed, and I received a call from Aini Wee, a staff accountant in the Finance Department. She had pulled my application from previous applicants and said that the position was open, but I told her I was not interested. She insisted that I apply again, so I did. During my interview with Finance Director Robert Gregg, he required me to do a two-page math test. I finished it in front of the director and told him ‘Don’t worry, all my answers are correct.’ I was offered the position.”
On improvements: “Starting Quyanna Care in 1998 was probably the biggest change. Around 2000, I had to make a tough decision on having my mom go there. In our culture in Gambell, we take care of our parents at home. It got really difficult for me to take care of her as she aged. I got her on board with going to Quyanna Care, and it made a big difference.”
On staying the same: “Of all the departments in the corporation, my job has probably changed the least. I’m still using the same software. The only thing that changed is it’s a newer version. The volume of what I do has gone up, but we still follow the same guidelines, and Accounting still has the same mission. Every year, we have to answer to the auditors. We have never had a bad audit.”

DAN THOMAS
Started: July 1993
Now: Health Aide Training Center coordinator
Other roles: Family Services counselor (1977 before a break), inpatient RN, VHS trainer-supervisor/instructor, outpatient RN, Health Aide Training curriculum coordinator (before a second break), Primary Care PA, Sub-Regional Clinic PA
On his mentor: “The most influential mentor in my life has been my mother Nancy Mendenhall, who first suggested to me the position of health aide trainer. Somehow, she knew that would be a good job for me. I have had several NSHC physician mentors who supported and helped me as a PA over the past two to three decades.”
On the best part: “Although I really enjoy teaching health aides and working to improve our program at Health Aide Training, my most special years were those in Unalakleet (1994-1997), working side-by-side with the health aides, doing my best to help with the community’s medical needs, and enjoying village life.”

MIKE OWENS
Started: September 1983 as EMS trainer
Now: EMS director
Other roles: EMS training coordinator
On improvements: “Communication is just mind blowing. When you figure you went from single sideband radio all the way to Viddo teletalk, where they can actually assess the patient before we get there. From when everybody in the world who can pick that radio wave up can hear that radio traffic, to where they can actually assess the patient before we get there. From when everybody in the world who can pick that radio wave up can hear that radio traffic going back and forth between doctor and health aide, to where the doctor can see the patient as if they’re in the next room. It’s just been phenomenal.”
On teaching: “When I first came here, it was like you were walking among the giants. The first class I ever taught, I was told by the EMS director that the health aides would not be able to certify for Basic Life Support, so I should just teach them the basics and make sure they understand to do CPR on their own. When we went over to Northwest Campus, and I’m left with all the mannequins, and I’m in a room with all the health aides, I thought, ‘Are you nuts? What do you mean they can’t certify?’ They all walked out with their certification cards.”

ELIZABETH COLER
Started: 1990 as registered nurse in Inpatient/OB/Emergency Department
Now: QCC audit and staff development RN
Other roles: Manager of Inpatient/OB/ED, Outpatient Clinic staff nurse, interim manager Outpatient Clinic, Clinical Informatics RN
On the best part: “The flexibility to do different kinds of nursing. The patients and staff I have been honored to work with and know. The camaraderie with coworkers as we take care of patients and each other.”

On what he’s known for: “Of all the departments in the corporation, my job has probably changed the least. I’m still using the same software. The only thing that changed is it’s a newer version. The volume of what I do has gone up, but we still follow the same guidelines, and Accounting still has the same mission. Every year, we have to answer to the auditors. We have never had a bad audit.”
“I have had a happy career with NSHC. I have gotten to know all our health aides. They are all special people. I have worked with health aides in every NSHC village clinic. Helping health aides do their difficult jobs with a great team of fellow trainers has been very rewarding. I think this may be the most rewarding teaching job ever.”

**ANNE IVANOFF**

**Started:** August 1993 as KNOM volunteer registered nurse in Inpatient/OB/Emergency Department  
**Now:** RN care coordinator and diabetes educator  
**Other roles:** Public Health nurse, diabetes case manager  
**On improvements:** “The growth of the corporation and staff with increased services to the region. Listening and responding to community and board guidance to increase access to care with continued progress toward healthier communities.”

**KRISCILLA BUCK**

**Started:** October 1994 as a community health aide  
**Now:** Community health practitioner  
**On her mentors:** “My first day was with Georgi-anne Anasogak and Norma Kavatchook in Koyuk. Georgi-anne said, ‘Don’t borrow stress. Don’t think about what might happen when you are on call. Just do your best when the time comes.’ My mom, Rita Buck, and her mom, Martha Agloiting, both worked as health aides. They, along with Willa Ashenfelter and Lucy Lincoln, helped our community for decades. When my mom became a supervisor-instructor, I loved it when she came home from her village trips. She really wanted to help our region’s health aides. Watching her adore them is something special.”

**On improvements:** “For NSHC as a whole: growth and preventative care. Increase in staff in all departments. A focus on healthy lifestyles and preventing illnesses and injury.”

**On help she’s received:** “I could not have done this job, trainings and on-call without the help and support of friends and family. My kids had wonderful babysitters while I was in training, at work and on call-backs. My oldest took care of her younger sisters a lot.”

**IDA LINCOLN**

**Started:** May 1995 as a clinic travel nurse  
**Now:** Community health practitioner  
**On changes:** “I loved working with CHAs as the CTC back then, Willa Ashenfelter and Rita Buck especially. Thankfully I paid attention to technology training back then (so that I can help Rita and Willa after the techs left), I’ve seen a lot of changes with technology since then. From Snappy (a program that sent pictures to a physician on call) to telemed carts and the many other programs NSHC has used. I am now the Cerner super user for the northern villages. When health aides have questions about the online medical record, they can call me or Cody Martin, who has the southern villages. We also take turns teaching the new CHAs.”

After 40 years at NSHC, Elvina Turner retires

NSHC’s longest serving employee retired at the end of April. For 40 years, Elvina Turner was based out of Unalakleet as part of the Behavioral Health Services team. Turner came on board as a village-based counselor and worked her way into the role of VBC field supervisor. She earned her certificate in Rural Human Services from the University of Alaska Fairbanks College of Rural and Community Development in 2006. In 2016, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium’s Community Health Aide Program Certification Board certified her as a behavioral health practitioner.

Known as a supportive and compassionate resource to her peers and supervisors, she has been recognized for her service several times. She received employee recognition from NSHC in 1990 and 2016. In 2018, at ANTHC’s Annual Behavioral Health Aide Forum, Turner received the Super Star award for her longevity and assistance to coworkers.

“Elvina is selfless and when families in need called on her or there was a death in the community, she was quick to respond, comforting the family, making food for them, and checking in over time,” said Lance Johnston, former director of BHS. “She will be missed, but she has earned every second of retirement!”

In retirement, Turner looks forward to traveling and spending time with family.

**CHRISTINE SCHULTZ**

**Started:** May 1999 as Social Services manager  
**Now:** Patient Support Services director  
**On the best part:** “One of the reasons I love working at NSHC is that the organization has been so creative in trying to address the needs of the people who live here in the region. I have been involved in developing a number of new programs because when we see a need for a service in the region, NSHC has tried to help our communities come up with a solution. Our response to the COVID pandemic has shown how much NSHC is committed to partnering with other programs in order to really meet the needs of our patients.”

**On meaningful work:** “One thought I would like to share is my profound honor in helping so many families over these years. Thank you for allowing me to share your lives for those moments that we spoke and worked together, especially those families that were struggling with a loss. One of the duties that I have had is managing NSHC’s bereavement programs, including the morgue, and have supported families who have experienced a death in the family. This has, over the years, been an area of my work that has allowed me to be of support to so many families. I have been sincerely honored and humbled to stand with so many families through tears and memories, and I thank you all for letting me be a part of your family at those times and throughout the years that I have been here.”

**JOSIE GARNIE**

**Started:** February 1997 as a village-based counselor trainer  
**Now:** Village-based counselor supervisor  
**On improvements:** “At BHS, there has been an increase in supportive services available. Urgent care is available during the day and on-call evenings, weekends, and holidays. Also, through technology, there are more services available for more people via televideo.”

**On her mentor:** “Teresa Sockpealuk-Perry from Shaktolik. She always reminded us of the value of our traditional knowledge and the importance of using it when working with people, and to always work from our hearts.”
NSHC employees honored at UAF Northwest Campus commencement

Nine NSHC employees were recognized at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Northwest Campus commencement ceremony on May 12. They celebrated recent accomplishments in achieving educational degrees, certificates, and credentials through UAF. From left: Beverly Nakarak and Helena Otton, Certificates in Community Health; Alfred Ningeulook, James Musich and Chase Gray, Certificate in Construction Trades Technology; Beverly Tran, Associate of Applied Science in Applied Business; Brendon Tran, Certificate in Construction Trades Technology; Ada Harvey, Bachelor of Arts in Social Work; Raenelle West (not pictured), NWC Credential in Applied Business and People Skills for the Workplace.

Competitive scholarship applications due June 30

Norton Sound Health Corporation offers a competitive scholarship worth up to $5,000 per term to qualified Alaska Natives/Native Americans. Applicants must be enrolled in a formal education or training program that would benefit the healthcare field, and they must meet all the general scholarship requirements.

The deadline to apply for the fall 2022 competitive scholarship is June 30, 2022. If you have any questions, please reach out to Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training & Development manager, at ijbarnes@nshocorp.org.

SPRING 2022 NSHC COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Amy Payenna, University of Alaska Southeast, Accounting
Kaitlyn Sebwenna-Painter, Fort Lewis College, Psychology
Jennie Reynolds, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Justice
Krystal Hensley, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Child Development and Family Studies
Ana Karmun, Oregon State University, Business Administration
Elizabeth Alowa, University of Alaska Anchorage, Legal Studies

Top row, from left: Jennie Reynolds, Elizabeth Alowa, Krystal Hensley. Bottom from left: Ana Karmun, Amy Payenna, Kaitlyn Sebwenna-Painter.
Regional students supported by NSHC Scholarships

Spring 2022 11

Norton Sound Health Corporation offers a general scholarship to higher education students attending for health-related fields but may be awarded for non-medical related studies if the degree can help further NSHC’s mission and vision. Priority is given to Indian Health Service beneficiaries from our region who commit to returning to the region and possible employment at NSHC. NSHC’s Scholarship Committee approves the award amounts each year. It is currently $1,000 per semester for returning high school seniors. Apply online at www.my-cache.org. NSHC’s scholarship deadline is June 30 for all but graduating high school seniors; their deadline was April 30.

SPRING 2022 NSHC NON-COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Leah Kavairlook – Alaska Career College, Business and Administration
Nikita Carter – Leeuw Community College, Culinary Arts
Maiykan Ivannof – Amundsen Educational Center, Construction
Arctic Ivannof – Amundsen Educational Center, Construction
Annie Otgasruak – AVTEC, Administration
Barbara Pete – AVTEC, Culinary Arts
Ariana Horner – University of California-Santa Barbara, Doctorate of Musical Arts
Michael Iom – John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Forensic Psychology
Erik Handeland – Oregon State University, Computer Science
Katze Kelso – Oregon State University, Architecture
Clair Fry – Brigham Young University in Idaho, Exercise Science
Ava Earthman – William College, Psychology
Stephanie Nelson – Hutchinson Community College, Nursing
Daniel Hans – University of Washington, Doctor of Medicine
Naomi Minix – University of Alaska Anchorage, Human Services
Sierra Anderson – University of Alaska Anchorage, Civil Engineering
Kelly Lyon – University of Alaska Anchorage, Pharmacy Technology
Jolene Lyon – University of Alaska Anchorage, Project Manager
Marilyn Moore – University of Alaska Anchorage, Social Work
Kylie Evans – University of Alaska Anchorage, Journalism and Public Communications
Kaelin Schenkenberger – University of Alaska Anchorage, Anthropology
Amy Bioff – University of Alaska Anchorage, Journalism and Public Communications
Annalis Contreras – University of Alaska Anchorage, Psychology
Rebecca Young – University of Alaska Anchorage, PhD Student
Alice Amaktooil – University of Alaska Anchorage, Nursing
Marie Balmazou – University of Alaska Anchorage, Sophomore
Gareth Jones – University of Alaska Anchorage, Aviation Technology
Taylor Anne Iom – University of Alaska Anchorage, Nursing
JoAnne Anderson – University of Alaska Anchorage, Nursing
Trista Topkok – University of Alaska Anchorage, Business Administration
Tori Ruud – University of Alaska Anchorage, Nursing
Delene Ilyo – Iliamna College, Inupiaq Studies
Kathleen Aukon – Alaska Chukchi College, General Education
Raenele West – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Administration Assistant
Marina Koonooka – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Pre-Nursing Qualifications
Lily White – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work
Yuka Ungwiluk – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work
Maggie West – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Accounting
Colleen Adams – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Accounting
Gwendalyn Trigg-Komakuku – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing
Lori Hughes – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Tribal Management
Teresa Troupie – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business
Alicyn Bahnke – University of Alaska Fairbanks, undeclared
Kailyn Haugen – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaskan Native Studies
Julie Amaktoolik – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business
Harrison Moore – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Timmy Speer – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Jolene Nanouk – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Rural Development
Brayden Bahnke – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Mechanical Engineering
Iyla Ivannof – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Kristan Tootoo – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaskan Native Studies
Jayden Ilyo – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Process Technology
Ida Seotet – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Ellie Martinson – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Musical Performance, Musical Education
Sharla Aningayou – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Early Childhood Education
Makayla Marble – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Computer Science
Talon Erickson – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Accounting
Melissa Ingersoll – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaskan Native Studies
Elizabeth Kakoona – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Ila James – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Alasa Wagnit – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work
Heather Kangas – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Physician Assistant
Brooke Anungauk – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Psychology
Keon Evans – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Accounting
Daniel Bahne – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Mechanical Engineering
Maggie Miller – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Rural Development
Amanda Patrick – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Associates of Art
Megan Rock – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing
Alexander Morgan – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing Sciences
Sonja Ningeokool – Fort Lewis College, Biochemistry
Joseph Kinnoot – Fort Lewis College, Journalism and Multimedia Studies
Mauri Burtak – Fort Lewis College, Biochemistry
Jewels Iyavpana – Fort Lewis College, undeclared
Dawson Evans – Fort Lewis College, Business Administration
Maggie Lyon – Fort Lewis College, History
Tiffany Ongtwarsuk – Fort Lewis College, Biology
Lydia Kuzamuk – Fort Lewis College, General Studies
Evelyn Rochon – Fort Lewis College, Psychology
Nicole Bruckner – University of Alaska Southeast, Education
Laurel Kathtagat – University of Alaska Southeast, Scientific Diving
McKenzie Sagonick – University of Alaska Southeast, Associate of Applied Sciences – Health Sciences
Erin Johnson – University of Alaska Southeast, Biology
Kalie Knottlon – University of Alaska Southeast, English Literature
John Wade – University of Alaska Southeast, Biology
Donovan Cooper – Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Aeronautical Science
Laurel Iomnoff – Institute of American Indian Arts, Creative Writing
Tristan Merchant – Portland State University, Health Science
Talia Cross – University of Hawaii at Manoa, Nutrition
Ariana Adams – University of Hawaii at Hilo, Business Administration
Skyey Ungwiluk – Lewis Clark State College, Psychology
Kastyn Lie – Stanford University, English
Kollin Kotongan – University of Hawaii at Hilo, Pharmaceutical Sciences
Alaina Pete – Umpqua Community College, Dental Assisting
Faith Itta – Washington State University in St. Louis, Social Work with a concentration in an Alaskan Native/American Indian Studies
Jewel Wilson – Whatcom Community College, General studies
Mary David – University of Denver, Social Work
Wallace Ungwiluk – Multnomah University, Business Administration
Hannah Shreve – Arizona State University, Special Education
Austin Moore – Elon University, Doctor of Physical Therapy
Josiah Brissin – George Fox University, Therapy/Kinesiology
Alexandria Iomnoff – University of Oregon, Journalism
Nathan Iomnoff – Oklahoma Baptist University, Elementary Education
Lawrence Lynch – Sonen Hall University, Kinesiology and Exercise Sciences
Donna Rupe – Seminole State College, Health Sciences
Nicole Ryan – University of Denver, Social Work
Cassandra Mike – Wayland Baptist University, Accounting
Jeremiah Hersrud – Bellevue College, undeclared
Katllyn Smith – University of Hawaii at Manoa, Environmental Science
Lisa Ellanina – William Mitchell College of Law, Law
Zoe Oldisais – California Lutheran University, English
Natalie Longley – Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences, Sciences
Shayna Warnke-Green – Salem International University, Biology
Charis Iomnoff – North Park University, Psychology
Will Fagerstrom – Colorado State University, Engineering Biomedical
Christina Gard – Regent University, Psychology and Counseling
Jaylene Wheeler – Lewis and Clark Law School, Environmental, Natural Resources and Energy Law Business
Macey Witosky – Boise State University, Business
Diana Handeland – Creighton University, Occupational Therapy

NSHC’s Board of Directors recently approved a scholarship for students pursuing education in a field deemed viable by NSHC through local, trade, or technical school, or other short-term training programs in fields critical to support healthcare. The scholarship range is $500-$2,500 per student enrolled in trade programs, including carpentry, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and boiler, etc., from an accredited institution. Students must apply at www.my-cache.org by at least four weeks prior to the start of training. Questions? Contact Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training and Development manager, at 907-444-4399 or ibarnes@nkcorp.org.

2022 VOCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS SO FAR

Eileen Bogeyatak – Alaska Career College – Business and Office Specialist
Nikita Carter – Leeuw Community College – Culinary Arts
Donovan Cooper – Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University – Aeronautical Science
Robert Dickson – Alaska Career College – CDL
Gerald Hughes, Odyssey Pilot Hours – Piloting
Arctic Ivannof – Amundsen Education Center – Construction
Maiykan Ivannof – Amundsen Education Center – Construction
Laux Kavairlook, Alaska Career College – Business and Administration
Annie Ongtwarsuk, AVTEC – Administrative assistant
Kathleen Panzer – Alaska Career College – Medical Assistant
Barbara Pete – AVTEC – Culinary Arts
Shernynce Steve, Alaska Career College – Medical Billing and Coding
Colton Thrune, University of Alaska Fairbanks – Aviation Maintenance
Get involved!

Consider joining one of these free classes available at the Wellness and Training Center.

TRADITIONAL DRUM MAKING Free. 4-7 p.m. every Wednesday. All basic supplies provided. Cecotone fabric, round wooden frames, wooden dowels, and all materials needed to cut and bend the pieces together. It takes about 2-3 classes to complete one drum. For more information, contact Gordon Iya: 907-443-3262 or email gsiya@nshcorp.org.

SEWING CLASS Typically for Day Shelter guests, but clients and patients may also use the room. All basic materials are provided: fur, leather, fabric, sewing tools, beads, sewing machines, sewing books and patterns. For information about taking or leading a class, call BHS at 907-443-3344.

CARVING CLASS Free and open to patients, clients, and the general public. Supplies are provided: walrus tusks, antlers, bones, and all tools needed to carve and shape your pieces. For more information, call BHS: 907-443-3344.

Above: Stephanie Oitilllian and Wanda Iya stitch a pair of mittens. Right: Benjamin Jack uses a belt sander to smooth the edges of ivory earrings.

When an adult asked whether the students enjoyed getting out on the land, all 20 hands shot up enthusiastically. The Daniels girls said they try to take advantage of all outdoor activities Elim life has to offer. The cousins recalled stories of relatives hunting oogruk (bearded seal) and animatedly spoke of cutting beluga that the hunters had brought home.

“There’s so yummy,” the girls said. “It’s the best!”

Elim was the third community to host a Wellness Week this year, INUA and the Kawerak Wellness Program will next visit Savoonga. During the visits, program staff organize cultural activities, share resources with community members, and encourage anyone who needs support to contact NSHC Behavioral Health Services.

“We let people know, we’ve been to therapy,” said Kira Eckenweiler, INUA’s prevention planner. “It’s okay to seek out help, and it’s okay to need help. There’s no shame.”

Eckenweiler appreciates visiting communities that are open to having deep conversations about mental health and suicide. She strives to share a message of hope with people around the region.

“We’re a strong people, we’re happy people, we can do this,” she said. “We are so capable of living happy, healthy, thriving lifestyles.”

Alaska Native dancing and singing online
From generation to generation, the knowledge of traditional songs and dances slowly becomes more fragmented. To help preserve the rich history of Alaska Native culture and arts, Benjamin Jack and his wife, Jolene Lyon, began a YouTube channel named “The Tapraq Way.” This 15-year-old collection of videos from the Bering Strait region has been published for anyone who would like to view the traditional songs and dances from Stebbins, Nome, and around the region. Check out their channel here: www.tinyurl.com/TheTapraqWay.

Carol Seppilu, INUA outreach coordinator, is an ultra-marathon runner and advocate for health. As a teenager, Seppilu survived a suicide attempt. Now her goal is to encourage others to live healthy lifestyles, focusing on the importance of traditional activities.

“I’d like to see us strengthen the cultural connection with our people, especially with the younger generation,” she said. “Our culture is a very important part of our lives and a very strong protective factor against suicide. We’re doing a lot more cultural activities and keeping it alive.”

While some students were working in the wood shop, others filtered into the school library to watch the documentary film I Am Yup’ik, about a teenager determined to lead his small village’s basketball team to a district tournament, creating a source of pride and healing for his community.

After the film, the floor was opened to sharing stories that included some personal accounts and some words handed down from elders. There were stories of the ever-mischievous little people, stories of wolves and mysterious whistling in the dark, and stories of crab fishing and preserving beluga.

“Learning to make drums may also act as a doorway to learning drumming and dancing. It certainly has in my case,” Iya said. Most recently, Iya has paired up with Carol Seppilu to host indigenous dancing and drumming events at the hospital.

After nearly a month of classes, one of Iya’s students has almost finished his first drum. Creating a drum has helped Kenneth “Phraustie” Hughes rediscover his Inupiaq roots.

As a child, Hughes was unable to participate in many of the cultural activities that his peers actively explored. As he grew older, he yearned for a place where he felt he belonged. Getting into a rehab program has almost finished his first drum. Creating traditional drum making with any who want to learn.

Growing up in Savoonga, Wanda Iya remembers watching her mother sew Native clothing. Native kickballs, and dolls made of seal skin. By the time she was 8 years old, her mother and aunt taught her the simplest of stitches. Through them, she discovered the value of carrying the knowledge of her ancestors.

Wanda Iya, a recovery coach, teaches a sewing course at BHS. Most of her students already have some experience with sewing and have made items like mittens, hats, yo-yos, necklaces, earrings, kuspuk, and quilts in her classes.

“I believe it is important to continue to gain knowledge and carry on what we learn from our parents, our grandparents, and other family members,” she said.

Whether it comes from a desire to reclaim one’s cultural presence within my life,” Hughes explained. “So, this is my reclamation of the culture, in a matter that makes sense to me.”

He’d like to learn as much about Inupiaq culture as he can and bring aspects of it to share with others. This includes learning a few songs from our region and other regions.

“It’s when we walk away from the culture, from who we are, that we lose ourselves to calamity,” he said. Growing up in Savoonga, Wanda Iya remembers watching her mother sew Native clothing. Native kickballs, and dolls made of seal skin. By the time she was 8 years old, her mother and aunt taught her the simplest of stitches. Through them, she discovered the value of carrying the knowledge of her ancestors. Wanda Iya, a recovery coach, teaches a sewing course at BHS. Most of her students already have some experience with sewing and have made items like mittens, hats, yo-yos, necklaces, earrings, kuspuk, and quilts in her classes.

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Whether it comes from a desire to reclaim one’s culture or from knowledge passed down through generations, Gordon Iya says embracing creativity can make a positive change in somebody’s life. As Ben Jack says, “Once you’re taught this skill, you’ll have this skill for life.”

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Protecting human health
is goal of new regional monitoring program

As climate change continues to warm nearby waters in our region, the risk increases for harmful algal blooms to release biotoxins—poisons that are taken up in clams, crab, and other shellfish. These poisons can be fatal to people when ingested at high enough concentrations.

In response to this emerging public health issue, Norton Sound Health Corporation’s Office of Environmental Health is adapting its focus.

In January 2021, OEH offered a virtual training on harmful algal blooms, or HABs, for tribal environmental programs in the Bering Strait region. Challenges of the pandemic, however, hampered participation.

Last October, OEH offered small environmental workshops for tribal environmental staff that included a session on HABs.

The training included virtual presentations from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Ocean and Earth Environmental Services. As a result of these sessions, it became clear that the region needed a HABs monitoring program.

OEH developing the program for the region because of the role seafood has in traditional lifestyles. A large part of our population hunts, fishes, and gathers clams and other marine or freshwater foods through traditional methods.

While commercial seafood is regularly tested prior to sale, traditional foods brought from ocean or river to dinner table are not screened for toxins that can cause illnesses such as paralytic shellfish poisoning.

This is not to say that traditional foods hunted and gathered from regional waters are unsafe.

However, to gauge the health of our waters and the potential for HABs, an important first step is to establish an early warning system for potentially unsafe HABs levels.

That first step involves gathering baseline phytoplankton data through a multi-year monitoring program. Over a period of three to five years, data will be collected to measure presence and absence of phytoplankton in the water.

Phytoplankton, or algae, are normal components of all aquatic environments. When certain species bloom in significant numbers and produce biotoxins, these events are termed harmful algal blooms. These blooms can negatively affect aquatic life and those who depend on that water for subsistence. How and why these blooms occur is complex and depends on ocean currents, winds, temperatures, and other factors.

Norton Sound Tribal Harmful Algal Bloom (NSTHAB) partners include any federally recognized tribes in the region that choose to participate in collecting water samples for OEH to analyze for the presence and absence of the target species.

The program is designed to support consistent monitoring of harmful algal bloom species using standard collection and microscopy practices.

During 2022, tribal environmental programs within the region can participate in developing sampling locations, as well as logistics of transporting samples to Nome within a key 24-hour period of collection or using microscopy onsite to analyze water samples.

A vital local level partnership is in place with Alaska Sea Grant, which coordinates with NOAA in collecting marine mammal samples (such as small samples from organs and intestines) and water samples to measure and monitor harmful algal bloom species in our region.

The ultimate long-term goal for this program is to protect human health. It aims to do this by monitoring phytoplankton and using higher level methods to test in a Nome-based lab for rapid results of potential HABs.

This long-term regional project aims to establish a safety monitoring system to protect future generations.

Technical collaborators include Ocean and Earth Environmental Services and NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Science Marine Biotoxin Program.

Key contributions from partners that benefit our region came from the Alaska Conservation Foundation, Alaska Harmful Algal Bloom Network, and Alaska Ocean Observing Systems. Through collaboration and coordination, Alaska Conservation Foundation made a significant contribution to provide NSTHAB with high-grade microscopes, sampling nets and bottles, refractometers, and other sampling supplies to ensure we are ready to start.
**2021 NSHC STAFF AWARDS**

**NSHC Values Awards**

**PRIDE – RONDA BURNETT** Reentry Program Manager, Nome. Ronda has worn different hats at NSHC but most recently is actively involved throughout the region through her work. She believes in the dignity of the people she serves and works diligently to connect them to needed resources. She works with community organizations but also acts alone and will drop everything to personally help someone in need. She is committed to seeing families in the region heal, grow, and thrive.

**PRIDE – DANIEL STANG** Director of Facilities, Nome. Though he oversees a department whenever a critical issue arises Daniel can be found in the thick of things with his crew. He gives great attention to detail, resulting in cost savings for NSHC and ensuring the smooth operation of the facility. He has great communication skills and is forward-thinking, which benefits departments across the board. He has high standards and holds his team accountable. In turn, those high standards are upheld by his team.

**COMPASSION – KEITH MORRISON** BHS Prevention Specialist, Nome. Keith has the support of his team behind him, who all say he goes above and beyond to care for those who need it. He will cover shifts and work long hours if it makes the difference of having a safe, warm place for clients to go. He treats everyone with respect and makes sure everyone’s needs are met. By caring so much for others—clients and coworkers alike—this employee is a genuine example of compassion.

**TEAMWORK – ROBERTA CASTEL** Patient Housing Lead, Nome. Roberta’s can-do attitude has made a world of difference in NSHC’s ability to meet patient needs during the COVID pandemic. For some time, Roberta was the only full-time employee in her department, answering all calls for help with COVID quarantines and isolations. She has since trained coworkers but continues to work over-time and take call. Her cheerful attitude and wealth of knowledge have been instrumental in caring for patients.

**ALWAYS LEARNING AND IMPROVING – BRITANY OXREOK** CHA II, Brevig Mission. Though having worked for NSHC for just over two years, Brittany has quickly moved up in the ranks and is finding her way to the COVID pandemic. For some time, Brittany was the only one taking call or when he did the work of three or four employees by himself. He continues to look for out for his team by performing quality and proficiency measures, instrument maintenance, and patient testing. He trains others and maintains a cheerful mood through it all. His hard work does not go unnoticed.

**CULTURAL SENSITIVITY & RESPECT FOR TRADITIONAL VALUES – SHANNON KLESCEWSKI** BHS Clinical Associate, Nome. Shannon has held different positions within NSHC, always with serving others in mind. She is willing to meet anyone wherever they may be in life. She treats others with respect and uses her traditional values to make others feel good. She provides a listening ear and uses humor to support those in need of a smile. Through her dedication and commitment to improving lives, she has helped many people walk away from BHS knowing they had a friend inside its doors.

**INTEGRITY – RICHARD KUZUGUK** Remote Maintenance Worker, Nome. Richard’s passion for his work shines through all he does. He has an honest drive to see communities have better sanitation conditions, including water and sewer. He helps communities and NSHC and other organizations better understand one another and the hearts of the issues. Richard is always willing to respond to emergency situations at the drop of a hat because he knows the importance of providing on-site assistance.

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**Employees of the Year**

**NOME STAFF – ALEX BAHNKE** Lab General Supervisor, Nome. Alex has shown extraordinary commitment to the region in the laboratory. There have been times Alex was the only one taking call or when he did the work of three or four employees by himself. He continues to look for out for his team by performing quality and proficiency measures, instrument maintenance, and patient testing. He trains others and maintains a cheerful mood through it all. His hard work does not go unnoticed.

**VILLAGE STAFF – TRAVIS KULOWYI** Clinic Travel Specialist, Savoonga. Some of Travis’ coworkers say “nothing would be possible” without him at the Savoonga clinic. Everyone feels they can rely on him to not only be present but to make sure a job is done. He is incredibly helpful and willing to go the extra mile to connect providers and patients. He is organized and knows how to contact patients before ever being asked. During the pandemic, Travis helped his community achieve one of the highest vaccination percentages in the region through his communications.

**Manager of the Year**

**STEPHANIE STANG** Wellness Director, Nome. Stephanie is highly motivated, driven, and results-oriented. She oversees several departments and ensures their smooth operation, all while being innovative and keeping work fun for all. She takes on additional tasks and takes them in stride. She oversaw the transition of some of her departments to a new location and made sure the move was as seamless as possible. She motivates her employees with her great attitude and exceptional support.

**REBA LEAN** Public Relations Manager, Nome. Reba is an adept leader, a quality that not only has a huge effect on her department but also on NSHC and the region. She leads by example and operates with inclusiveness and integrity. She communicates clearly, gives constructive feedback, and makes difficult decisions. Her leadership has been invaluable, especially during the pandemic, as her team has demonstrated its commitment and dedication to transparent, up-to-date communications.

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**Rocks for wellness**

Around 50 people turned out on Wednesday, May 25, for a rock painting event as part of Mental Health Awareness Month. The Savoonga Clinic Travel Committee—comprised of staff from Behavioral Health Services, Native Connections, Iñuna, and Kaverak—planned the event, which attracted school kids, adults, and families. Many rocks were decorated with positive messages and then hidden around town for someone to discover. At right, BHS’s Kim Knudsen sprays the brightly painted rocks with a protective finish.
EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

MAY – ALFRED NINGEULOOK Maintenance Technician, Shishmaref. Alfred works to keep the Shishmaref clinic maintained in a timely manner with little supervision, always with no complaint. He goes beyond his duties to help the community and fellow coworkers. Before the new clinic opened, Alfred spent countless hours fixing water and septic freeze issues, all on his own. While it is easy to take a well maintained clinic for granted, Alfred deserves recognition for all he does.

JUNE – CHELSEA HUBERT Acute Care RN. Nome. Chelsea’s high level of skills, in combination with her calm demeanor in tense medical situations, makes her an asset to the corporation. She provides superior patient care and advocacy, and she goes beyond the call of duty as an exceptional leader. Chelsea always brings a smile to work and provides joy to the Acute Care department’s patients and staff members.

JULY – CECELIA NASSUK CHA II, Koyuk. Toward the tail end of an outbreak in Koyuk, Cecelia remained enthusiastic about her job. She does not hesitate with providing needed home visits, takes on housekeeping duties to fill the gap, and keep up with supplies ordering and medication distribution, all while being asked to keep up with her studies. Cecelia’s impressive dedication is a model for others.

AUGUST – HILARY FELLO WIC Manager, Nome. Hilary has shown outstanding dedication and commitment to her clients in the last year. With changing funding and program updates, she stayed on top of notifying the region. She is consistent, present every day, and always willing to help out, however needed. When she is the only person in her department, she remains positive and continues to share needed resources and education.

SEPTEMBER – HAE “ANGELA” KIM Kitchen Supervisor, Nome. Angela showed great resilience and dedication in the Nutrition Services department, working through the pandemic with minimal staff. Whenever she is around, she is trusted to get the job done. She picked up countless shifts and gives 110%. Angela works hard to provide food to the nursing departments and patient hostel to ensure patients are fed.

OCTOBER – JODIE SCARLETT Primary Care LPN, Nome. Jodie goes out of her way to be helpful. Not only does she take the time to listen to patients, make sure she understands them correctly, and responds to their needs, but she also looks out for her peers, always asking if there is anything she can help them with. She is constantly assisting others with completing their tasks, sharing her knowledge, and providing excellent customer service.

NOVEMBER – JERRY KOWCHEE Food Service Worker I, Nome. Jerry is willing to try it all in order to help out Nutrition Services. When short-staffed in the department, Jerry would take on the role of two staffers without being asked. He picks up new skills with enthusiasm and continues to be willing to learn more to help where needed. Additionally, he picks up extra work days and hours when asked. He is so appreciated in his department.

DECEMBER – ROCHELLE DAVISON CHA-Trainee, Elim. Rochelle is a relatively new member of her team, but she has already made a difference. She is compassionate and shows pride in her work and is always learning. Patients compliment her for the care she provides, and she takes on duties outside her job description. Rochelle volunteered to work extra hours to ensure the Elim clinic was clean. She pitches in when she sees a need to make sure jobs are completed.

RABIES

Continued from page 13

ments of Environmental Conservation and Health and Social Services, the Bering Strait region generally sees about four or five animals with lab-confirmed rabies each year. Some years the region has no cases.

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Continued from page 13

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RABIES

Continued from page 13

ments of Environmental Conservation and Health and Social Services, the Bering Strait region generally sees about four or five animals with lab-confirmed rabies each year. Some years the region has no cases.

Between October 2020 and June 2021, however, the State of Alaska Virology Lab and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed over 35 rabies cases from the region.

“If someone is exposed or think they may have been exposed, they should go to the clinic immediately,” said Alicia Reitz, NSHC OEH specialist. “Their medical provider will determine whether they need to receive the post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) shot series to minimize the risk that an infection will advance.”

One month after Gambell’s first rabies incident, a second dog was put down due to suspected rabies infection. The rabies case was confirmed, and the community was put on alert to tie up loose dogs and make sure all pets were vaccinated. Posted flyers encouraged residents to report animal bites to the clinic and warned that any unvaccinated pets exposed to rabies would need to be put down.

OEH organized a rabies vaccination clinic for the community April 8-20. Although the chances of people getting rabies from animals are relatively low, potential exposures should be taken seriously. There are a few easy ways to reduce the risk:

- The best way to protect the community from rabies is to make sure pets have current rabies vaccinations, which creates a layer of immunity between the community and wildlife. Secondly, it is best to avoid close contact with all wild or stray animals. If you must be in contact with them, wear gloves.
- If you want to know when your pet is due for its next rabies shot and who in your community can give rabies shots, contact Alicia Reitz at OEH at 907-434-1659 (text or call) or at areitz@nshcp.org. If you get bitten or scratched by any animal, immediately report it to the clinic and local VPO.

How will you know if you need rabies treatment?

If considering whether a PEP shot for rabies exposure is needed, a medical provider will ask:
- Did an exposure to rabies potentially occur?
- Did an animal with fur bite the person?
- Did the person’s open wound, broken skin, or mucous membrane contact saliva or central nervous system tissue from the animal?
- The answer is “yes” to one or more of the questions, the medical provider will next consider additional factors such as low-risk animals vs. high-risk animals, or whether the animal was displaying signs and symptoms of rabies after a 10-day quarantine. PEP treatment might be initiated immediately for a person with severe bites to the head or neck after an unprovoked attack from a high-risk animal. PEP may be discontinued if testing proves the animal was not rabid.
- A medical provider might determine that treatment is unnecessary if any of these are true:
  - The animal is a vaccinated and healthy pet;
  - The suspected animal tests negative for rabies;
  - The animal shows no signs of rabies after a 10-day quarantine.

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Vaccines and boosters remain important tools

By Dr. Mark Peterson
NSHC Medical Director

COVID-19 is in the region to stay. The virus that caused a pandemic over two years ago has shaped itself into something that will resemble the common flu, likely with seasons of outbreaks and fewer deadly outcomes. The current dominant variant causes illness that is less severe than its original form and some subsequent variants. While it may be difficult to accept that the virus will always be around, doing so will allow people to move forward with their normal lives. Practices like masking and keeping distance from others can now be adopted at will or in special case scenarios, like localized outbreaks.

Still, there are some recommended precautions that will help keep everyone safe.

Norton Sound Health Corporation still recommends people keep up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations.

Three-fourths of the region’s population has been fully vaccinated with the initial series of COVID-19 vaccinations. This provides reasonable protection against developing severe illness from an infection, but booster shots are recommended. Only about 46% of the eligible population has received a first booster shot.

Everyone 12 years and older is eligible to receive a booster shot. It is recommended to have a first booster dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine five months after the second dose of mRNA vaccine. People aged 50 and older can receive a second booster shot four months after their first booster. Those who had Johnson and Johnson vaccine as their first vaccine are encouraged to use Pfizer or Moderna as their booster, as long as they do not have an allergy or other contraindication to an mRNA booster.

Testing for COVID-19 is recommended for those who are experiencing symptoms and for close contacts of positive cases. Testing is no longer required in order to travel into the region or on Bering Air, nor recommended regularly for non-symptomatic people.

When individuals test positive, providers will instruct them to isolate for five days from the onset of symptoms or, if not experiencing symptoms, the date of their positive test. Their isolation period is considered completed after the five days as long as they have not fevered for 24 hours and any symptoms are improving. For the next five days, individuals should wear face masks around others.

NSHC has treatments available for high-risk patients who contract COVID-19. People who are high risk for progression to severe COVID illness can ask their provider about these treatment options, which include the tablets (Paxlovid) and the IV infusion (Bebtelovimab). Common risk factors for severe disease include obesity, diabetes, COPD, heart disease, and others. Age 65 and older is also a risk factor for more severe disease.

The shift from pandemic to endemic is underway. In the region, rabies is an endemic virus in foxes. It is always present in the geographic area, and it can still have localized outbreaks. The influenza virus is endemic in humans and is mostly predictable in its infectious seasons. Just as vaccines are available to combat those viruses—vaccines for dogs in the case of rabies, and annual flu vaccines for people—the COVID-19 vaccine will remain available and recommended.

With the COVID-19 pandemic on its last legs, the region should be proud of its response. Community leadership and individuals helped ensure one of the state’s lowest regional death rates and highest vaccination rates.

NGIE’s REPORT
Continued from page 2

Augment medical services available. The Tribal Health and INIA program continue to provide outreach education and support to help patients cope with trauma and grief. NSHC is working to implement a region-wide home care program to better meet the needs of patients in their homes. Personal care attendant training is underway.

NSHC has succeeded in building new health clinics in the following communities since 2014: Gambell, Savoonga, Shaktoolik, Diomede, and Shishmaref.

A new clinic will be completed in St. Michael this summer, and new construction of a health clinic and housing quarters in Wales will begin this summer. Employee housing is also a critical need region-wide. In May, NSHC purchased the former Shishmaref clinic and will renovate it into staff housing. In Gambell, two new duplexes will be constructed. Plans are underway to renovate the former Community Health Services building in Nome to convert it to housing. To meet the growing nursing home waitlist, NSHC will expand Quyana Care Center from 18 beds to 50 beds; the 12-bed expansion design is underway. A new day care facility is also under design.

The recently-passed Infrastructure Bill includes $3.5 billion to support water-and-sewer projects for the next five years, with the majority of this documented unmet need being in Alaska. The dream for piped water and sewer for our unserved communities will become a reality, but it will take many years from concept to completion.

A regional Community Utility Assistance Program (CUAP) has been established to provide the operation and maintenance support needed to keep existing water-and-sewer systems updated.

For this effort, our region is blessed with considerable funding from the American Rescue Plan, and the Rural Community Assistance Program (RCAP) has provided much-needed support.

The Quarantine Team is still kicking! Though cases have slowed dramatically since early 2022, when this photo of Tobias and Meesavik, and Roberta Castel was taken, the team of individuals who answer calls from COVID-19 patients is still working hard to meet the needs of the region. The team provides boxes of groceries for households with positive COVID-19 cases. They also transport patients to isolation housing, attend to patient needs, and are in constant communication with the COVID-19 medical response team.

Continued from page 2

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At-home tests
Did you get a positive result on your at-home COVID-19 test? Please report it to NSHC for medical guidance. Call the Nurse Call Line at 907-443-6401 or 844-586-8773 for more information.

Get your free at-home testing kit from the Public Health Center in Nome or by ordering online from www.covid.gov/tests.

Community endemic COVID-19 means new normal

Endemic COVID-19 is not a bad thing. In fact, it is a new normal, where people can find comfort in doing things the same way they always have with acquired knowledge about infection prevention.

Congratulations to the community of Stebbins as it has been included in the first round “Tier 1” of approved funding. The Stebbins project is estimated to cost $78 million and will be broken down and funded in phases. During the last week of April, the NSHC board and management team met to develop a five-year strategic plan. The key goals include: Housing, water and sewer, child care, mental health, workforce development, in-region services, and communication.

There is no lack of work to be done. NSHC continues to strive to be the leader of Tribal health in Alaska.