

Kanigsirugut News

kang·ik·see·roo·koot (Iñupiaq): we understand

Winter 2023-24

The Newsletter of Norton Sound Health Corporation

No. 76

Coming to life: Unalakleet revives dance group

Just over a year ago, Amber “Kapuu-kaq” Cunningham could not get the sights and sounds of Alaska Native dancing out of her head.

Home in Unalakleet from her recent trip to Anchorage for the annual Alaska Federation of Natives convention, Cunningham’s mind was still filled with all she had seen and heard during AFN’s Qujana Nights.

For two nights during the convention, Alaska Native dance groups from

across the state had performed in front of large audiences at the Dena’ina Center. As Cunningham watched the

by the happiness she saw reflected in the dancers’ and drummers’ faces.

“That’s what we’re missing. We

“This has been a very healing experience for all of us involved. It’s a great way to express emotions. I have found inner peace.”—Linda Cooper, Unalakleet

groups, she took in their vibrant outfits, the resonating singing and drumming, and the beautiful, unapologetic movements. She was especially struck

really need that,” she thought, picturing her home community.

Cunningham was not alone in her feelings. Others wished to bring back

traditional dancing in Unalakleet, too. That became apparent when she gathered the courage to make a post on her Facebook page. She told her friends and community members that Aasanaaq Kairaiuak “Ossie,” member of the well-known Yup’ik singing group Pamyua, was willing to come to Unalakleet and teach community members how to dance.

Already an idea simmering among

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Photo: Reba Lean

Wales community Elder Clifford Seetook assists Joanne Keyes, NSHC Board representative for Native Village of Wales, with cutting the ribbon to the new clinic, as NSHC CEO Angie Gorn and Board Chair Tony Haugen stand by.

Wales celebrates opening of new clinic

A few weeks before Christmas, the community of Wales got to cut the ribbon to their new clinic building. It was an early unveiling to celebrate the highly anticipated facility and its neighboring staff housing triplex.

Though contractors are still putting the final touches on both buildings, NSHC Administration wanted to make sure to give the long-awaited building a proper celebration with members of the executive committee of the NSHC Board of Directors in attendance.

On Dec. 5, community members gathered around the stairs to the new

clinic, located on the north side of town near the community’s runway. As light snow fell, NSHC Board Chair Tony Haugen thanked everyone for coming in person to celebrate the clinic and new triplex, which will house NSHC staff members.

Joanne Keyes, NSHC board representative for the Native Village of Wales, took up the oversized golden scissors along with Wales Elder Clifford Seetook, and together they clipped through the ceremonial ribbon. The building contractor, ASRC SKW Eskimos, cleared the way to give community members

a sneak peek inside the still-under-construction clinic.

Octavia Tokeinna is a community health aide in clinic. She currently works from the 1,700-square-foot clinic that was built in Wales in 1996. She says the new clinic will have a big impact on the small community.

“The new clinic brings a symbol of a new start,” she said. “It’s the chance of a lifetime to change and allow opportunity to benefit lives for generations to come.”

The new clinic is 3,800 square feet and is a modified Denali Commis-

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Grant supports improved NSHC dementia care

Norton Sound Health Corporation was recently awarded a \$200,000 grant by the Indian Health Service to further its mission of improving dementia care and support for individuals in the Norton Sound/Bering Strait region. This grant is part of \$1.8 million in funding from the IHS for tribal organizations across the U.S.

Dementia is a brain condition that gradually impairs memory, thinking, behavior, and the ability to perform everyday tasks. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common type of dementia. According to the IHS, one-third of Alaska Native people ages 65 and older are at risk of developing dementia, and more than half of people in underserved populations with probable dementia have either not been diagnosed or are not aware of their condition.

The grant, which will be managed by the In-Home Support program of the Patient Support Services department, will support NSHC in developing increased services by addressing any service gaps for patients with dementia.

“Our goal is to strengthen families and reduce the number of people moving out of the region to receive care,” said Tierra Austin, personal care ser-

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Photos: Reba Lean

TOP: The new Wales clinic is located on the north side of town, near the community's runway. It is modeled after the same design used for the clinic in Shaktoolik that opened in 2019. ABOVE: NSHC Board Chair Tony Haugen addresses a small crowd of Wales residents that came to celebrate the new clinic. The staff housing triplex is pictured in the background.

WALES CLINIC

Continued from page 1

sion template clinic—the same design as one opened in Shaktoolik in 2019. It includes three exam rooms, two trauma beds, a specialty clinic space, behavioral health space, sleeping quarters, and an emergency generator. It is designed to support an on-site pharmacy, lab, traveling providers, and a portable X-ray machine.

Tokenna said she looks forward to more space, better organization and closer proximity to the airport. She said there are high hopes for a permanent advanced practice provider to move into the new staff housing facility.

The new triplex is over 3,000 square feet and is the same design as the staff housing built in St. Michael. It has two two-bedroom units and one spacious studio unit.

The new clinic is expected to open to the public within the next month.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Supporting quality care in Koyuk

John Prentice has worked as a clinic travel specialist (CTS) since 2016. In 2023, he was promoted to CTS supervisor. He grew up in White Mountain and moved to Koyuk in 2005, where he became a stay-at-home dad for 10 years while keeping the church up and running throughout the year. Now, when not at work, he is enjoying the subsistence lifestyle and spending time with his family, gathering food with his wife and seven children year round.

As a CTS at the Koyuk clinic, Prentice answers and directs incoming telephone calls, schedules patient appointments with providers or health aides, and ensures that patient travel needs are met. He sometimes performs basic and helpful clinical duties. He finds that being able to multi-task and be polite are skills vital to the job.

Please describe what you like most about your job.

My favorite part of the job is knowing that I make a big difference in our community as far as helping them get appointments and helping them get their health issues addressed if they must travel elsewhere for them.

How do clinic travel specialists provide quality care in our region?

We provide quality care for those that need to be seen elsewhere in cases where we don't have the needed equipment here or they need more care than can be given in the village. The hardest part of the job is trying to get them out when flights are full, or if the plane is on the way and is a few minutes out, but when you get good at it anyone can do it. CTSs can even have an impact on emergency care. There have been times when I have advocated for a patient

to be medevac'd to a higher level of care, and they experienced a positive outcome because of that. A couple of years later the patient called me at my work to thank me personally, which was all the recognition I needed.

What advice would you share with someone who wants to be a CTS?

I would say that if they want a job where they can be busy and help in other ways—if they cannot handle doing needles and shots—then they should try it and give it a little time to grow on you.

When I first started, I applied because it was the only job open at the time. It was so hard to go from an on-your-feet-all-the-time to a sit-down job, and I would go home every day for about three months tired after the workday. It eventually grew on me, and now I enjoy every part of my job.



Photo: Koyuk Clinic Staff

NSHC health and career fairs come to village communities

At NSHC health and career fairs, one can find health resources and education, vaccinations, laboratory blood draws, incentive prizes, and around 18 or more people who are more than willing to give a glimpse into the world of healthcare careers.

Since last summer, NSHC has kicked off its effort to bring back traveling health and career fairs to its regional communities. The NSHC Board of Directors encouraged Administration to bring back the fairs after several quiet years without the events.

The fairs offer an engaging way for many programs to reach a large portion of the community all at once. Typically with tables set up around a school gymnasium, the fairs allow community members to go booth-by-booth to find out about resources available to them, get caught up on vaccinations or applications, and get to know more about their own health through laboratory tests.

In the most recent trips since the 2023-2024 school year began, the fairs have included more of a careers-focused element as well.

In planning the events, NSHC gathers up interest from its staff in

traveling to the communities where schools have agreed to host a visit. With enough staff to fill a couple of chartered planes, the team sets off from Nome for a long day trip in the scheduled community. In Shishmaref, Brevig Mission, and Elim, the team invited in elementary and middle school students to preview the health fair during the school day while meeting the NSHC staff members and learning about the various departments at their booths. In the afternoon, the team members visited high school classrooms to give an NSHC careers presentation and offer a more in-depth look at their own careers. NSHC staff members detailed the positions available in the local community and highlighted the level of education needed for different roles throughout the organization.

In the previous events, the health fair has opened to the public after school lets out in the afternoon, allowing families to visit together. With departments like In-Home Support Program, Patient Benefits, CAMP, Dental, Behavioral Health Services, Human Resources, and Office of Environmental Health, among others, along on the trip,



Photo: Reba Leon

ABOVE: CAMP staff members provide Elim students with education about sugar content in popular drinks and the dangers of tobacco and vaping use. RIGHT: Christine Murray gets her blood drawn for laboratory testing during the Elim health and career fair in November.



Photo: Alexis Erikson

there is much to learn at each fair. Each fair offers chances to pick up small prizes and to win larger door prizes, often including backpacks, thermoses, or ATV helmets.

NSHC hopes to bring a health and career fair to every community in the region and is working with schools in the Bering Strait School District to plan its next stops.



Photo: Angel Franklin

The Personal Care Services Team. From left: Kristy Kuzuguk, Melissa O'Connor, Gracy Lust, Tierra Austin, Florine Loeits-Bannow, Shamrock Twaddle, Christine Schultz, Cammie Hayward, and Charlotte Key.

DEMENTIA CARE

Continued from page 1

vices office manager.

The funding will be used in part to employ a staffer to coordinate referrals, assessments, and caregiving resources for identified patients. Staff will receive more training in standardized screening tools, allowing for earlier diagnosis and intervention. Each patient will have comprehensive case management, including referral to other resources such as caregiver support services.

“Our plan is to increase community awareness and education about dementia, provide clinical evaluations and increase timely diagnosing, support unpaid family caregivers with resources, increase the number of paid

caregivers through our existing programs, and provide wrap-around care and case management,” Austin said.

Through increased outreach and coordination of clinical services and in-home personal care services, the goal is to create a comprehensive and sustainable approach to dementia care within the region. The efforts will lead to improved care, resources, and support for individuals and families affected by dementia, enhancing the overall quality of life in the region.

“We are grateful that IHS has chosen Norton Sound as a grant recipient to help bridge this gap in care for our regional members,” Austin said. “We are excited to create a model to share with other rural tribal health organizations.”

Ten warning signs that someone may be developing dementia

As we get older, our memory can sometimes change. Some people notice these changes themselves, while others might have their friends and family point them out.

Getting an early diagnosis can help with treatment and make sure you get a chance to plan for the future.

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these symptoms, call Social Services at 907-443-4540 to speak with a medical social worker who can connect you to further resources.

You can also call the Alzheimer's Association help line at 1-800-272-3900. For more information, visit www.alz.org or www.alz.alaska.org.

Here are ten warning signs that an individual may be developing dementia:

1. Memory decline causing disruption in daily life: experiencing memory lapses, repeating information, or increasingly relying on aids like sticky notes or reminders.

2. Difficulties in problem-solving and planning: struggling with tasks such as managing finances or preparing familiar recipes.

3. Trouble performing routine tasks: facing issues with cooking, driving, using a cell phone, or shopping.

4. Confusion regarding time and place: difficulty in comprehending future events or losing track of dates.

5. Challenges in processing visual information and spatial relationships: experiencing difficulties with balance or depth perception, stumbling over objects at home, or frequent spills and drops.

6. New difficulties with communication, both speaking and writing: finding it hard to participate in conversations, or struggling to recall specific words (e.g., saying “time-telling device on the wrist” instead of “watch”).

7. Misplacement of items and an inability to retrace steps: unintentionally putting car keys in the washer or dryer, or struggling to retrace one's movements to locate lost items.

8. Decreased or poor decision-making: falling victim to scams, managing finances ineffectively, neglecting personal hygiene, or experiencing difficulties caring for a pet.

9. Withdrawal from work and social engagements: reluctance to attend church or other regular activities, or inability to follow sports events or stay informed about current affairs.

10. Shifts in mood and personality: becoming easily agitated in ordinary situations, or feeling fearful and suspicious.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and the Alzheimer's Association

Preventing traumatic brain injuries takes teamwork

A main focus of CAMP's Injury Prevention program is preventing traumatic brain injuries (TBI) in the region.

Funded through the Tribal Injury Prevention Cooperative Agreement Program (TIPCAP), NSHC's Injury Prevention program works to reduce TBIs through increasing helmet safety education and equipment and to promote helmet use.

Through two main events throughout the year, Injury Prevention shares its message far and wide.

During the Iron Dog Race's Half-way Banquet in Nome, Injury Preven-

tion partners with Alaska Safe Riders and the race to share a safety seminar with youth and the community. Last year, Iron Dog donated 50 snowmachine helmets to distribute at the event and the Injury Prevention program donated another 10. With 60 helmets distributed to the community in one night, there was a major impact on helmet use in the community, according to Katie Hannon, Injury Prevention TIPCAP coordinator.

From helmet use surveys conducted by the Injury Prevention program, about 50% of the helmets given away were being used in the months after the event. In 2024, the event will be held from 4-6 p.m. on Feb. 21 at the Mini Convention Center.

The other main event is a bike rodeo in Nome.

In June 2023, the rodeo was held in the Norton Sound Regional Hospital parking lot with multiple vendors, much like an outdoor health fair with a focus on bicycles and bike safety. With hearing and eye care screenings,



Photo: Katie Hannon

Theo and Rhonda Sparks chat with Oliver Hoogendorn, avid cyclist and "Race to Survive: Alaska" champion, who volunteered to help at last summer's bike rodeo in the Norton Sound Regional Hospital parking lot.

bike registration provided by the Nome Police Department, and light bike maintenance provided by local volunteers, it was a one-stop-shop for gearing up for summer bike fun.

Throughout the rest of the year, Injury Prevention travels to regional communities to continue spreading education about traumatic brain

injury and offering chances to win helmets as prizes through different events.

Working to prevent traumatic brain injury requires diligence—and teamwork. Injury is the leading cause of death among Alaska Natives and American Indians ages 1-44, and Alaska has the highest rate of TBIs in the nation.

You can help prevent traumatic brain injuries in your community!

- ▶ Encourage helmet use;
- ▶ Support a local helmet law;
- ▶ Contact CAMP Injury Prevention at 907-443-3365 to find out how to spread education and helmet access.

CAMP re-introduces intuitive eating to promote health

NSHC's Chronic Care Active Management and Prevention (CAMP) program team is working to shed the many layers of outside influence on eating habits that have built up over the decades. CAMP wants individuals to listen to their bodies and to harness their natural intuition when it comes to food.

With the introduction of Western dieting, the traditionally intuitive ways of eating were called into question. Through mass media, people learn about ideal bodies and the methods they should take to achieve those. The eating habits that came naturally were replaced by restrictive diets that leave little room for traditional foods and practices.

Recently there has been a shift away from the decades-old idea that Western dieting and exercise are the most effective ways to be healthy. Experts now say reclaiming more intuitive ways to eat food or exercise is a powerful way to reduce stress, retain cultural identity, build self-love, and improve mental health.

It is also a journey of self-discovery and focuses on building a healthy body image, making peace with food, and listening to yourself. It uses instinct, emotion, and intention to combat irrational thoughts that govern eating decisions.

"Incorporating the components of

Ten key principles of intuitive eating

1. Reject the diet mentality
2. Honor your hunger.
3. Make peace with food.
4. Challenge the food police, i.e. ditch the "good" vs. "bad" food labels.
5. Discover the satisfaction factor.
6. Feel your fullness.
7. Cope with your emotions with kindness.
8. Respect your body.
9. Focus on how exercise makes you feel.
10. Honor your health with gentle nutrition.

Source: *Intuitive Eating*, by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch

intuitive eating positively affects the consumption of traditional foods, as it removes 'food rules' that people have that may stop them from consuming their traditional foods," says Kylie Potter, a CAMP dietitian.

CAMP recently offered an intuitive eating course that gave participants insight into the self-care framework and ten key intuitive eating principles established by dietitians.

"Individuals, not only in our region but all over the world, have been pulled away from our ability to intuitively eat through influence of diet culture," said Nicole Santonastaso, CAMP prevention program supervisor.

"We are constantly seeking the quick fix to lose weight, but in reality, we need to just listen to our bodies and understand that all bodies are different and will look different."

According to Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, dietitians and authors of the book *Intuitive Eating*, people tend to overeat or binge on foods they label as "bad" and do not allow themselves to eat freely. If a person can stop the condemnation of these foods, then they can eat in moderation without guilt.

Wendy Osinkosky, participant in CAMP's Intuitive Eating course, shared how taking the leap to eating intuitively has changed her perspective on food.

"Taking the class helped me learn to enjoy food in a mindful way," she said. "The dieting culture is so restrictive and has so many 'forbidden foods.' The more we restrict, the more we crave. The class taught me to thoughtfully welcome all foods—in moderation, of course."

No matter where a person is on their self-care journey, here are a few reasons to give it a try.

▶ **IT REDUCES STRESS.** When trying to stick to a strict eating plan,

worrying about when to eat and what to eat can be stressful. Staying present and making empowered choices takes the stress out of trying (and maybe failing) to stick to a restrictive diet.

▶ **IT HELPS RETAIN CULTURAL IDENTITY.** Before Western dieting, many cultures relied heavily on their environment and traditional knowledge of harvesting food. By embracing intuitive eating, traditional knowledge and practices around food are reclaimed, while still enjoying other foods that are easily accessible.

▶ **IT HELPS BUILD SELF-LOVE.** As individuals learn to build healthy relationships with food, they develop a sense of body acceptance. "All foods fit" is the intuitive eating approach, and means that no foods are "good" or "bad". Losing the labels helps one make peace with food, and as an extension, a person builds self-love.

▶ **YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVES.** Ditching the restrictions on food can boost self-esteem, lower the chances of depression, and have positive behavioral and psychological outcomes, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Do you have questions about intuitive eating? CAMP is available Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., and can be reached by phone at 907-443-3365, or by email at wellness@nshcorp.org.



Photo: Alexis Erikson

Berries of summer that enrich winter

RECIPE: Tundra Blueberry Crumble Muffins

A winter powerhouse for wellness, the immune-boosting properties of tundra blueberries go a long way during the cold, dark months. Even frozen, they offer a great variety of vitamins and minerals to help keep your immune system strong during cold and flu seasons. To bring variety to this recipe, you can swap tundra blues for other tundra berries or skip the streusel crumble topping.

STRUESEL CRUMB TOPPING

- ▶ ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ▶ ¼ cup white sugar
- ▶ ¼ cup light or dark brown sugar
- ▶ ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ▶ ¼ cup butter, melted

BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

- ▶ 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- ▶ ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ▶ 2 tsp baking powder
- ▶ ¼ tsp kosher salt
- ▶ ½ cup butter, melted
- ▶ 1 large egg
- ▶ ⅔ cup milk
- ▶ 2 cups frozen tundra blueberries

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a muffin tin with paper liners. Set aside.
2. Crumb topping: In a small bowl, combine the flour, sugar, cinnamon, and melted butter. Mix until crumbs form. Chill in the refrigerator until ready to use.
3. Muffin batter: In a large bowl, combine and whisk muffin ingredients together, adding blueberries last
4. Spoon batter into liners, slightly over half full, leaving room for the crumb topping.
5. Take crumb topping out of fridge and break apart. Spoon crumb topping onto each muffin and gently press into batter.
6. Bake 20-23 minutes, until the crumbs are golden brown. Enjoy warm or cooled.

Tribal healers: Treatment for carpal tunnel syndrome without surgery

With mobile phones in hand and computer keyboards within reach for large portions of the day in modern times, the common nerve condition known as carpal tunnel syndrome may seem like an inevitability these days. But similar conditions in the wrist have been known throughout history, and traditional practices may help prevent or ward off the syndrome.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is commonly found in adults, especially women, who will experience numbness or tingling in their fingers. The sensation primarily affects the thumb and the index and middle fingers. According to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), over time, symptoms may worsen and lead to losing the ability to grab small objects, and the numbness could persist in fingers all the time.

While there could be many causes of the syndrome, it occurs when the median nerve, which runs from the forearm to the hand, becomes squeezed too much while in the carpal tunnel in the wrist. Surrounding the nerve inside the wrist are tendons, ligaments and bones, and when those surroundings are injured or damaged, they can put pressure on the nerve.

Etta Tall, a tribal healer at NSHC, is trained in helping patients manage their carpal tunnel syndrome through massage, but she has an even better grasp on helping prevent the syndrome.

Tall says Elders in Little Diomed teach people to avoid wrist injury by using proper techniques during traditional activities.

“When you cut seal, or even when you split the skin, the Elders always say ‘Don’t move the wrists around,’” Tall said.

Tall follows the advice in her own line of work and tries not to move her wrists excessively when working on her patients.

“I’m very careful now because I learned from one of the senior tribal healers because the Elders taught her.”

NIAMS encourages patients who are experiencing symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome to be seen by a medical provider as soon as possible. NSHC primary care providers may refer patients to nonsurgical treatments, including splinting or bracing, steroid injections, or tribal healing, if they want to avoid surgery.

About four years ago, Anahma Shannon says she began experi-



Photo: Reba Lean

Evelyn Karmun, NSHC tribal healer, treats patients with carpal tunnel syndrome by massaging their forearms and hands, manipulating tendons and ligaments within to help ease pressure on the median nerve.

encing problems in her wrist that became debilitating. Extreme cramping in her right wrist—the side on which she used a computer mouse—led to limited mobility.

“I know that my mother had carpal tunnel surgery, and I didn’t want to get to that point,” Shannon said.

She sought tribal healing as she often does at the first signs of discomfort. Evelyn Karmun, NSHC tribal healer, met with her to address the symptoms.

Karmun works on patients experiencing carpal tunnel syndrome

using massage and hand manipulation.

Donning gloves, Karmun will spray her patient’s wrist and arm with a soothing oil. She works the oil into the skin with purposeful massage. She begins feeling for the ligaments and tendons and strums them into place in the forearm and hand.

Shannon said Karmun started her work on the wrist, but as she kept up her visits, Karmun began to work her way up the arm. She worked on her elbow and then her shoulder and eventually made her way to the back, where the tendons connect beneath the shoulder blade. The process took six months of return visits, but Shannon says she no longer experiences any issues in her wrist.

“Instead of giving me surgery on my wrist, she was able to tackle the root problem,” Shannon said. “I always advocate to go to the tribal healers if possible, especially if it’s the beginning of an issue. It’s a great time to learn about how your body is interconnected.”

Throughout her treatments, Karmun keeps up a running commentary on the purpose behind her movements. By the end of her massage, the hand’s circulation is improved. She recommends patients pay return visits about twice a month.

Karmun instructs patients to drink plenty of water between visits and stretch their wrists by making gentle figure 8 movements in the air. She suggests shaking out the hands periodically throughout the day to keep the circulation going, and to pay attention to wrist ergonomics during everyday activities.

If you are experiencing symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome, speak to a provider. To schedule an appointment with the Tribal Healing program directly, call 907-443-1035. Patients in village communities may request a tribal healer visit to their community.

Use Mindbody app to join CAMP fitness classes

Last fall, the CAMP department introduced the Mindbody app to the region for scheduling fitness classes. The smartphone app allows users to find and book local workout classes, wellness services, and more.

Download the Mindbody app on your smart device, and you will be able to reserve spots for CAMP’s group fitness classes and view and sign up for other fun CAMP events.

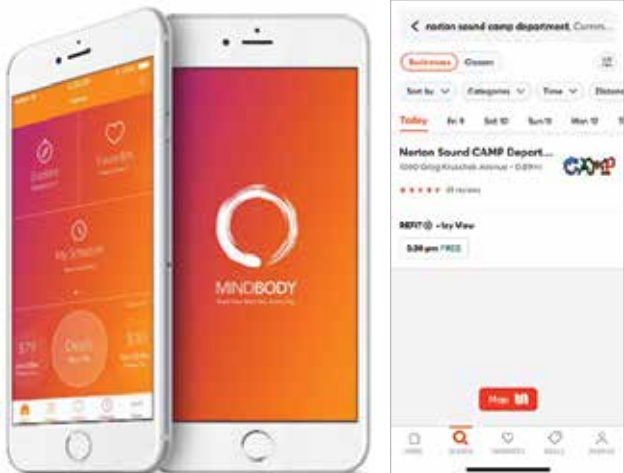
Search for CAMP’s classes by entering “Norton Sound CAMP Department” into the app’s search bar. Then you can add it to your favorites and

keep an eye on upcoming classes and events.

The CAMP department offers group fitness classes including yoga, dance, and interval training, among others, at different locations around Nome. Classes are free and appropriate for all audiences.

To participate in CAMP classes, you must sign up in advance using the Mindbody app, which will include a liability agreement for different classes.

If you need help with the app or



don’t have a smart device, you can arrive to class early to ask the instructor for assistance.

For a schedule of CAMP classes, find CAMP in the Mindbody app or visit www.nortonsoundhealth.org/CAMP.

COMING TO LIFE

Continued from page 1

people in the town, the post became the catalyst for a meeting of several people who set to work combining their knowledge and resources to form a dance group.

The first dance practice was held November 20, 2022.

“We had one song at that point,” Cunningham said.

The song had originated in Unalakleet in the 1800s and tells a story of caribou hunting. It had been translated in 2020 through the efforts of a group of people with Unalakleet roots who wished to bring back songs that had been tucked away during the many years of Westernization. The group, including Ayyu Qassataq, Adrienne Blatchford, Theresa John, and others, practiced the song and, with help, put moves to it.

Linda Cooper, a founding member of the dance group with Cunningham and at the time a bilingual and bicultural teacher at the Unalakleet school, said the 2020 translation project provided a foundation to support the current effort to revive dance in Unalakleet.

Several generations ago, Cooper explained, the light that was the tradition of dancing in Unalakleet was slowly snuffed out as colonization progressed. The last recorded time Unalakleet’s community dance group performed at a regional messenger feast, when people from different locales gathered to express their communities’ needs, was in 1915.

As more non-Indigenous newcomers moved in, Unalakleet’s cultural traditions—including dancing and speaking Unaliq, their local dialect of Inupiaq with a mix of Central Yup’ik—were tamped down and all but extinguished. Missionaries and teachers strongly discouraged dancing, traditional gatherings, and speaking the Native language.

Over the years, some in Unalakleet made concerted efforts to pass the old knowledge and ways on to future generations. Cooper said bilingual and bicultural teachers would teach elementary students how to dance with



Photos above and below: courtesy Amber Cunningham

Unalakleet dance group members show off their drums made during an NSHC BHS drum making workshop in August. From left, standing: Jodi Gilley, Doreen Cooper, Brianna Blatchford, Amber Cunningham, Carol Wilson, Linda Cooper, instructor Ben Jack. Kneeling, from left: Roger Nanouk, Arianna Savetilik, Cassidy Cunningham.

mentary students how to dance with help from Elders in neighboring communities. For a long period lasting into the 1990s, fifth-grade students would travel to perform at the Stebbins dance festival, Curukaq, in the spring.

Cooper held onto the dances and songs she was taught in her elementary school years. She said the teachers would drill into the students the words to each song and the corresponding moves. While the knowledge lay dormant in the minds of the former stu-

“As we were learning the new stuff, it was great to hear from the Elder mentors: ‘Don’t be afraid to express yourself.’”

—Linda Cooper, Unalakleet

dents, those who have joined the dance group are finding that they still know some of the songs.

“The fifth graders have kept this going for so many years, we really depend on them,” said Cooper. “Once they see just a little spark of it, the memories come flooding back.”

Since forming in November 2022,



The Unalaqliq Inuutchak dancers prepare for a performance in Unalakleet. From left, standing: Linda Cooper, Amber Cunningham, Carol Wilson, Teri Paniptchuk, Brianna Blatchford. From left, sitting: Charlie Katchatag and Cassidy Cunningham, wearing matching kuspiks from Unalakleet’s bicultural class.

the dance group has, bit by bit, been collecting songs and dances. Visitors from nearby villages taught the group songs, Pamyua’s Ossie taught them three songs, a dance group at the University of Alaska Fairbanks taught songs over Zoom, and Cunningham even tracked down song owners after learning dances from YouTube.

“We recently learned a Yup’ik basketball song,” Cunningham said. “I watched a YouTube video. Of course it was Byron Nicholai—I instantly fell in love.”

Nicholai, a young man from Toksook Bay, became YouTube-famous for his Yup’ik singing and dancing. Cunningham showed the video to her son, who instantly recognized the song and dance from his father’s hometown of Napaskiak.

The song’s writer, Julia Sipary, happily gave permission to Unalakleet to use the song.

“It was like the song was meant to be for us,” Cunningham said. “I specifically wanted a song that the kids would relate to, and basketball is huge here. It definitely has been a favorite.”

The dance group continued to grow. Practices went from once a week

to three times a week. A major milestone for the group came when they were invited to the Stebbins dance festival at the end of March last year. It became the first time in 108 years that a Unalakleet community dance group participated and performed at a potlatch of that kind. After that, the group went on to perform at sporting events and even the AFN Elders and Youth Conference last October.

While the large performances are encouraging and meaningful for the group, Cunningham said, it’s the local performances that get her blood pumping.

Some community members in Unalakleet still have strong reservations about dancing or the effort to revitalize it. But being visible has been worth facing the nerves, according to Cunningham. She said the singing and dancing is a great way to tie into the old language, and it’s important for people to see that.

“My mom didn’t get the opportunity, my gram definitely didn’t get the opportunity (to learn),” she explained. “Once the Covenant Church came, it was kind of hushed for a while.”

Making physical movements to the

Continued on next page



Photo: Carol Gales

Unalakleet students performed at the grand opening of the Anikkan Inuit Iluaqutaat Sub-Regional Clinic in 2003. Today, the Unalaqliq Inuutchak group performs some of the same songs the students performed at the opening: the Goose Song and the Siksrík (squirrel) Song.



Photo: Tonia Osborne

Ben Jack smiles amidst all the drums made in Unalakleet during a community workshop in August.

BHS staff teach drum making to new dance group

Last summer, Unalakleet's new dance group reached out to Norton Sound Health Corporation's Behavioral Health Services prevention team to ask for assistance with making drums. While the school's bilingual program allowed the group to borrow its collection of drums, the group wanted its own.

In August, Ben Jack, a cultural arts instructor with BHS, traveled to Unalakleet along with two other BHS prevention programs workers. With about a decade of making drums under his belt, Jack says he loves the opportunity to teach others.

He arrived in Unalakleet with the supplies: dozens of wooden hoops of either 12-inch or 24-inch diameter, twine, dowls, and airplane fabric, which, when coated

with polyurethane, provides a similar twangy sound as traditional walrus skin would.

The drum making classes went on for three days, during which time the BHS staffers helped host a potluck for participants. Jack said the combination of helping create a total of 38 drums, keeping a tradition alive, and seeing so many smiles really brought home the meaning of their work.

"I'm so blessed to fall into this role," Jack said.

BHS has several different prevention programs, funded through different grants, aimed at preventing substance use and mental disorders. NSHC's BHS department focuses on cultural revitalization as a key ingredient of prevention.



Photo courtesy Amber Cunningham

The Uᅗalaᅗliᅗ Iᅗuutᅗak dance group was invited to perform at the 2023 First Alaskans Institute Elders and Youth Conference.

COMING TO LIFE

Continued from page 6

lyrics of the songs makes it easy to understand the meaning of the words.

Cooper says she has always enjoyed that part of dancing.

"I really liked to dance," she said, recalling her younger years. "They would make fun of me because I was very expressive in my moves. As we were learning the new stuff, it was great to hear from the Elder mentors: 'Don't be afraid to express yourself.' I'm not really shy, and I really value the storytelling aspect behind it. I really try to pass that down to our youth because our storytelling has been lost."

Cooper said the group considered the importance of all they were doing when contemplating a name for themselves. They wanted the name to be meaningful but also easy enough to say. Cooper consulted her Elders and mentors in town for ideas. It wasn't until they found a North Slope dialect Iᅗupiaᅗ phrase that they settled on their group's identity: Uᅗalaᅗliᅗ Iᅗuutᅗak, which means "Unalakleet Comes to Life."

From her perspective as the group's lead drummer, or when dancing when

she gets the chance, Cooper sees the dancing having a positive impact.

"This has been a very healing experience for all of us involved," she said. "It's a great way to express emotions. I have found inner peace."

Cooper said her favorite song to perform is called the Grandparents Song, taught to the group by Fred Mike of St. Mary.

Growing up so closely with her own grandparents, Cooper said, the song struck a special chord with her. Before performances, she reaches out to her grandma, her ancestors, and invites them to come with her and be with her.

"In English the story tells us, 'Every day we look for them, we walk to them, we reach for them,'" Cooper said, translating the chorus. She said the song goes through a few verses, focusing on the grandma, the grandpa, and then both of them together.

She described the movements to the song.

"We do a drum solo, and we're running, we look for them, pull them into an embrace. And at the end you do this grand finale. You put your arms out, and it's like you're all together, embracing."

Diomedede marks grand opening of clinic building

After a series of setbacks, NSHC finally celebrated the new Diomedede clinic in September 2023. The clinic opened in 2021, but the delivery of its furniture, fixtures, and equipment was delayed due to poor weather until 2022. The storm ex-Typhoon Merbok then unfortunately swept away the container with the equipment before the items could be installed.

With the pieces finally in place in 2023, NSHC planned a ribbon cutting ceremony for the community in the summer. It was rescheduled twice before it could take place. NSHC board members and staff arrived on Little Diomedede for a ribbon cutting ceremony at the community's new clinic on Sept. 22.



ABOVE: NSHC Board Chair Tony Haugen and Diomedede Mayor Robert Soolook cut the ribbon. LEFT: Angie Gorn, NSHC CEO, gave remarks during the ceremony.

NSHC mourns loss of board member Stan Andersen

In September, NSHC mourned the death of Stanley Charles Andersen, longtime NSHC board director and City of Nome councilman.

Stan was born in 1946, a twin to the late Steffen L. Andersen, to Steffen and Mary Andersen. He graduated from Nome High School in 1964. He attended and played basketball for Clark College in Vancouver, Washington. Afterwards, he became a U.S. Navy Seabee during the Vietnam War and, for many years in Nome, was



a member of the Veterans of Foreign War Post #9569 and served in officer positions through the decades. Throughout his life, he held positions with the State of Alaska Department of Motor Vehicles, as a plumber, and as manager of the Bering Sea Saloon.

Andersen joined the NSHC board in 2011 as a representative for the City of Nome. During his tenure, Andersen was an advocate for not only health-care services but also the maintenance and expansion of facilities necessary to operate the programs. He supported the entire region and made many trips to communities to see the condition of the NSHC facilities firsthand.

“He was a caring man, not only for

Nome but the region,” said Preston Rookok, NSHC board representative for the Native Village of Savoonga. Rookok noted Andersen’s passion for ensuring facilities were in working order and the many questions he would ask when visiting village clinics about their operations and any issues.

Rookok said Andersen also had a mind for finance.

“He had served as treasurer, he made sure we were within budget and everything was running smoothly,” said Rookok. “He is a person who worked well with everybody. I don’t think we can replace him with anyone else with his experience. He is going to be dearly missed.”

Most recently, Andersen was a member of NSHC’s board committees on clinical services, finance and audit, hire and development, site planning and construction, and water and sewer. He served as treasurer from 2016-2019. The NSHC Board chose to carry on Andersen’s memory by renaming the vocational scholarship the Stan Andersen Vocational Scholarship, in honor of his passionate support of training for maintenance and support staff.

Stan Andersen is survived by his sister Mary Andersen Straub; children Sharla Pate, Crystal Andersen Booth, Derreck Andersen, Travis Andersen, and Justin Andersen; 15 grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

Work progressing on NSHC facility projects in region

QCC expansion project update

The current Quyanna Care Center was constructed in 2014 as a long-term care facility with 18 resident beds. It soon became clear, however, that there was greater demand in the region for Elder care, and so planning to expand the building began. The expansion project will add 12 beds for a total of 30 beds.

Anchorage-based firm Architects Alaska designed the concept layout in partnership with NSHC’s engineering team. The expansion will be 14,452 square feet, doubling the total area of QCC. The new area will match the general building height and external appearance of the main QCC building. The addition will feature some improvements, including larger resident bedrooms and redesigned restrooms. Several spaces will be remodeled to include an additional staff lounge, central nurse station, kitchen, and long-term dry goods storage.

In fall 2023, Cornerstone General Contractors and STG Incorporated completed site work, including driving pile foundations. NSHC purchased Bose headphones for the current residents to protect against noise. The construction work is on hold through the winter months and will resume in spring 2024. The project is anticipated to be completed in fall 2025.

Nome patient lodging expansion

By spring, patients visiting Nome for medical care should have more lodging options as the conversion of the former Community Health Services building into a second patient hostel location is nearing completion. The renovation will create an additional 16 rooms to expand NSHC patient lodging capacity. The \$8.7 million project is expected to be completed in June.

Regional morgue update

NSHC has successfully completed morgues in St. Michael,

Koyuk, Elim, Stebbins, Shishmaref, Brevig Mission, Wales, Gambell and Savoonga. Morgue buildings have been constructed Golovin, White Mountain and Teller. The contracting company, Paug Vik Development Corp., completed the Teller mechanical and electrical work in October and is waiting for AVEC to make the final utility service connections. Paug Vik’s electrical and mechanical work at the Golovin and White Mountain morgues was to be completed in January and ready for the local utilities to make final service connections.

Koyuk home purchased to house local staff

In January 2023, NSHC finalized purchase of a 3-bedroom home in Koyuk. The home is currently being renovated to house an advance practice provider for the village. Renovations, done by Pomeranz Construction, are scheduled to be completed in February 2024.

Shishmaref housing quarters update

The former Shishmaref clinic has been transformed into a duplex to house staff. This project will be completed in February 2024. There is a two-bedroom apartment for permanent staff members, and a two-bedroom dorm-style unit for traveling staff. Both units have running water, bathrooms and laundry access. Shishmaref’s new clinic opened in 2021.

Acute care revision complete to support behavioral health patients

The scheduled renovation of two acute care rooms at Norton Sound Regional Hospital to better support the needs of behavioral health patients is nearing completion and awaiting final inspection. The rooms were designed to reduce self-harm for patients. This capital project was funded by COVID-19 funding. Project cost was \$950,000.



Chase Gray, Village Facilities Management director, instructs student worker Alex Noyakuk through a fire extinguishing drill.

Students get hands-on experience

Last summer, NSHC hired high school students in seasonal positions throughout the organization. Nome student workers and NSHC’s college student summer interns met weekly for Lunch and Learn opportunities organized by the Tribal Training and Development program. During the lunches, students learned from professionals throughout the organization.

The final summer gathering was a hands-on experience with facilities maintenance departments over a barbecue luncheon and afternoon tour. Students learned about the many facets of keeping operations running in NSHC facilities throughout the region, including the hospital, Wellness and Training Center, Nome Operations Building, and the 15 village clinics. They learned about refrigeration, toured the hospital’s penthouse air-handling system, practiced putting out fires, and even heard from the Office of Environmental Health about work on testing drinking water from communities around the region.

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Provider Care Line



SCAN



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844-586-8773

Use the Provider Care Line for:

- After-hours medical advice from an advance practice provider
- Reaching a Behavioral Health Services provider after hours
- A 24-hour back-up line for your local clinic



George Otten, Stebbins water operator, receives some assistance from NSHC RMW Program Manager Richard Kuzuguk during a Small Treated Water Systems training in Nome in October 2023.

Partners share progress on water and sewer efforts around region

CUAP, NSEDC partner to fund community needs

As part of its partnership with the Community Utility Assistance Program, Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation pledged to contribute \$500,000 for five years to help support community reserve accounts, water and sewer expenses, and contract plumber and electrician costs.

NSEDC and the CUAP awarded \$15,357.14 to every community in the CUAP in 2024 to lower water and sewer costs to customers. The funds were sent to the utilities in January and should be reflected in utility billing.

► For the City of St. Michael, each residential customer will receive \$204.76 on their water and sewer account. This credit will amount to 10% savings on residential customer water and sewer utilities.

► For the City of Golovin, each residential customer will receive \$333.85 on their water and sewer account. This credit will amount to a 25% savings on water and sewer utilities.

► In Savoonga, residential customers will receive \$101.03 on their water and sewer account. This credit will amount to a 10% savings on their water and sewer

utilities.

NSEDC and the CUAP sent \$15,000 to communities that have established their repair and replacement accounts and amended their FY2024 budgets, including Golovin, Savoonga, St. Michael, Stebbins, Shaktoolik, White Mountain and Unalakleet. The CUAP team is still waiting for some cities to establish their accounts and amend their budgets, which are requirements of the best practice score metrics to receive full points on the revenue section.

Per the Best Practice Score guide, a Repair and Replacement account is for funds set aside for parts that need to be replaced sometime between every year and every seven years. The utility should have a line-item budget allocated for repair and replacement expense. The utility must track a year-to-date R&R amount and show contributions to the annual budget allocation. CUAP's goal is to build up the R&R accounts for the next five years

CUAP implements new testing pilot program

CUAP awarded a water sampling and testing

WHAT IS THE CUAP?

The Bering Strait Tribal Community Utility Assistance Program (CUAP) was formed in 2021 to help empower each city government to carry out high quality, DEC-compliant water and sewer programs.

Its efforts initially started with the creation of the Norton Sound Health Corporation Board's Water and Sewer Committee in the fall of 2017. Board members from regional villages expressed the challenges of both served and unserved communities. Villages with installed piped water and sewer struggled with maintenance and repair, while unserved communities continue to haul water and waste.

In 2021, the region was awarded a \$20 million grant from the Helmsley Charitable Trust; the grant is managed by Engineering Ministries International (EMI). Additionally, NSHC and Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC) have each pledged \$500,000 for five years towards the development and establishment of the CUAP.

The CUAP is based on a technical assistance and support model working towards improving the best practice scores established by the State of Alaska to determine operations and maintenance capacities of rural water and wastewater utilities

contract to Alaska Water Laboratories of Wasilla. The pilot program is serving 11 communities in the region. CUAP has taken over costs of analysis and shipping of water samples. The hope is that taking over the cost burden and helping facilitate communication with the water lab can help utilities with water sampling and compliance.

UPCOMING TRAININGS

► May 7-10, 2024: OSHA Safety, Excavation Hazards & Confined Space Course. Contact Laurel Katchatag at 907-434-0950.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

► CUAP's webpage (find most up-to-date community best practice scores by clicking on your community page): www.nortonsoundhealth.org/CUAP
► Water Sampling Guidance for Water Operators: www.arcticoutlook.com/resources/drinking-water.

Sanitation and CUAP introduce new staff to serve region



NSHC Sanitation welcomes new water & wastewater engineer

Steven McGee is an accomplished engineering project manager with a strong background in civil engineering and a dedication to serving the Native community. Previous to joining NSHC, he was a valuable member of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium team, contributing to the organization's mission and working closely with the late Sean Lee to support the core values of NSHC.



NSHC Remote Maintenance Worker Program hires new RMW I

NSHC hired Monti Tarawneh in January 2024 as one of the RMW positions funded 50% by the State of Alaska and 50% by NSHC. Monti first came to Nome working for a freight company. He realized he really enjoyed the community and wanted to contribute his skills to NSHC. He has experience with heavy equipment operating, in addition to other skills.



EMI & CUAP hire new project manager

Amiah Fezer, CUAP project manager, was hired through CUAP partner Engineering Ministries International. Amiah has a strong background with experience working on humanitarian aid efforts in Yemen. The EMI partnership has provided significant support for the region's communities.

Area students supported by NSHC scholarships

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 must meet all general scholarship requirements. Questions? Contact Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training & Development education coordinator, at ijbarnes@nshcorp.org.

FALL 2023 NSHC COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Ana Karmun – Oregon State University, Finance
Rhoda Kotongan – Grand Canyon University, Biology, Pre-Med emphasis
Amy Payenna – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Teri Ruud – Alaska Pacific University, Nursing
Beverly Tran – University of Alaska Southeast, Interdisciplinary Studies
Jewel Wilson – West Washington University, Biology

Norton Sound Health Corporation offers a general, non-competitive scholarship to higher education students aiming 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 Services beneficiaries from our region who commit to returning to the region and possible employment at NSHC. NSHC’s Scholarship Committee approves the award amount each year. It is currently \$1,500 per semester for full-time students. Apply online at www.my-cache.org.

- FALL 2023 NSHC NON-COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS**

Colleen Adams – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Accounting
Avery Agloinga – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Management
Sonya Annogiyuk – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Education
Nathaniel Appolloni – University of Alaska Fairbanks, English
Tierra Austin – University of Alaska Anchorage, Pre-Nursing
Arianna Avugiak – Alaska Pacific University, Nursing
David Bahnke – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Airframe and Powerplant Certification
Cara Barr – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Psychology
Samuel Bourdon – University of Alaska Anchorage, Health Science/Kinesiology
Daniel Brandt – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Civil Engineering
Henrik Brandt – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Physics
Josiah Brisson – George Fox University, Physical Therapy/Kinesiology
Lanie Brisson – Northwest Nazarene University, Secondary Art Education
Hazel Brunette – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Business
Dorothy Callahan – St. John’s University, Undeclared
Guadalupe Callahan – Suffolk University, Advertising
Carly Christopherson – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Carter Commack – University of Alaska Anchorage, Biological Sciences
Benjamin Cross – Alaska Pacific University, Outdoor Studies
Christian Douglas – University of Alaska Kenai Peninsula, Paramedical Technology
Matthew Douglas – Aveda Institute Twin Falls, Barbering
Ava Earthman – Williams College, Psychology
Lisa Ellanna – William Mitchell School of Law, Law
Mandy Ellanna – University of Alaska Fairbanks, General Studies
Karis Evans – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Criminal Justice
Kylie Evans – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Criminal Justice
Caleb Evatt – University of Alaska Anchorage, Aviation Maintenance Airframe
Stephanie Fahey – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Tribal Governance Program
Victoria Fisher – University of Alaska Anchorage, Heath Sciences
Christina Gard – Regent University Online, Psychology and Counseling
Victoria Gray – Montana State University, Elementary Education (K–8)
Sharlyna Gologergen – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
MacKenzie Goodwin – University of Alaska Southeast, Elementary Education
Caden Hanebuth – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Criminal Justice
Krysta Harrison – University of Alaska Anchorage, Social Work
Keanu Henry – St. John’s University, Biology
Kathleen Herzner – University of Alaska Fairbanks, General Program
Jeremiah Hersrud – Bellevue College, Undeclared
Chisana Hildreth – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Health Science
Kenneth A. Hughes IV – Alaska Pacific University, Outdoor Studies
Asa Hukill – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Psychology
James Isabell – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Management
Alexandria Ivanoff – University of Oregon, Journalism
Dorothy Ivanoff – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Jazara Ivanoff – University of Alaska Anchorage, General Program
Lexi Ivanoff – University of Alaska Anchorage, Diagnostic Medical Sonography
Nathan Ivanoff – Oklahoma Baptist University, Elementary Education
Jacob Iya – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Isaiah James – Alaska Pacific University, Nursing

- Erin Johanson** – University of Alaska Southeast, Biology
Alyssa Jemewouk – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Business
Pohaku Kahai – University of Hawaii Hilo, Computer Science
Parker Kenick – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Computer Science
Addison Knudsen – Brigham Young University Idaho, Business Administration
Marina Koonooka – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Community Health
Nadine Koonooka – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Medical/Dental Reception
Caitlin LeClair – University of Alaska Anchorage, Psychology
Aralye Lie – University of Hawaii Hilo, Undeclared
Kastyn Lie – University of Alaska Southeast, Elementary Education
Florine Loeits-Bannow – University of Alaska Anchorage, Speech and Language Pathology
Erica Longley – University of Alaska Anchorage, Human Services
Lawrence Lynch – Seton Hall University, Accounting
Ellie Martinson – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Music Performance
Lucas Marvin – Montana State University Bozeman, Chemistry
Raina McRae – Gonzaga University, Psychology
Chantal Miklahook-Noongwook – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Nursing
Harrison Moore – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Marilyn Moore – University of Alaska Anchorage, Social Work
Zachary Moses – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Process Technology
Lauryn Nanouk Jones – Western Washington University, Environmental Policy
Alison Narog – University of Idaho, Biology
Asaaluk Nichols – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Business
Amy Nguyen – Central Washinton University, English Language Arts Teaching
Summer Osterback – University of Alaska Anchorage, Diagnostic Medical Sonography
Amber Otton – University of Alaska Southeast, Educational Leadership
Mercedes Otten – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Debbie Peacock – Alaska Pacific University, Business Administration
Janelle Pootoogooluk – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Business
Jennie Reynolds – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Justice
Sharon Rida – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Applied Business
Donna Rupe – Oklahoma Panhandle State University, Nursing
Alexis Rexford – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Rural Development
McKenzie Sagoonick – University of Alaska Southeast, Associate of Applied Science; Health Sciences
Matthew Schubert – University of Alaska Anchorage, Nursing
Brenna Scholten – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Chemistry
Jana Schuerch – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Ida Seetot – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Helenmarie Sinnok – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Education
Nicole Sherman-Luce – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Pre-Nursing
Katlyn Smith – University of Alaska Southeast, Alaska Native Indigenous Studies
Leeta Sookiayak – University of Alaska Anchorage, Economics
Ravenne Storms – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Dental Assistant
Sabrina Toolie – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Education
Trista Topkok – Alaska Pacific University, Business Administration
Christena Towarak – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Elementary Education
Zachary Tozier – University of Alaska Southeast, Biology
Yuka Ungwiluk – University of Alaska Anchorage, Social Work
Sarah Wade – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Undeclared
Alazae Waghiyi– University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work
Trisha Walters – University of Alaska Fairbanks, General Management
Shayna Warnke-Green – University of Alaska Anchorage, Exercise Science
Tatum Weckwerth – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Business Administration
Annie Weyiouanna – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska Native Studies
Lily White – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Social Work
Rebecca Young – University of Alaska Anchorage, Clinical–Community Psychology

NSHC offers the Stan Andersen Vocational Scholarship for students pursuing education in a field employable by NSHC through a vocational, trade, or technical school, or other short-term training programs in fields critical to support health care. The scholarship range is \$750-\$3,000 for students enrolled in trade programs, including carpentry, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and boiler, etc., from an accredited institution. Students must apply at www.my-cache.org at least four weeks prior to the start of training. Questions? Contact Irvin Barnes, Tribal Training and Development education coordinator: 907-443-4559 or ijbarnes@nshcorp.org.

- FALL 2023 STAN ANDERSEN VOCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS**

Steffen Booth – University of Alaska Fairbanks, Airframe and Power Plant
Nolan Ivanoff – Alaska Driving Academy, Commercial Driver’s License
Lori Martino – Alaska Career College, Medical Assistant Specialist
Cass Mattheis – College of San Mateo, EMT I
Haley Osborne – Blue River Aviation, Instrument Flight Rating
Roberta Schambeck – Alaska Career College, Medical Assistant Specialist

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



FEBRUARY 2023 – ASHLEY EARP AuD., Audiologist, Nome. Ashley is extraordinarily caring and empathetic. She values her team and cares deeply for the community. She works tirelessly to meet patient needs, especially during a time of significant short staffing when, for over a year, Ashley was the department’s only full-time audiologist on-site at NSHC. She continued to have great rapport with her patients, who seek her out as their provider, and she continued to go the extra mile for specific patient needs.



MARCH – SHANTAH ESPARZA Maintenance Engineer, Nome. Shantah is a team player and a natural mentor in facilities maintenance. His good attitude uplifts others, and his expertise in his role is invaluable. There have been several scenarios when Shantah’s specialty knowledge has been critical to NSHC operations and has prevented emergency shutdowns of essential equipment. One example of his expertise is when the hospital’s oxygen generator went down. He was able to troubleshoot the generator—the only one of its kind in the region—and had it back online before the hospital ran out of its oxygen supply.



APRIL – DAVID O’NEILL Corporate Housing Property Manager, Nome. David is always ready to lend a hand without delay. He is a team player whose hard work helps ensure Corporate Housing runs smoothly, even when last-minute complications arise. Last winter, this employee’s willingness to respond to issues, no matter the time of day, prevented freeze-up and further damage of vacant housing units during periods of extremely cold temperatures. David never hesitates to step in to help and does so with a smile on his face.



MAY – JOHN “BUCKY” PRENTICE Clinic Travel Specialist, Koyuk. Bucky is a role model for others around the region. He is an integral part of his clinic, and ensures patients’ needs are being met above all else. The way he is able to make arrangements for patients in a quick fashion when flight schedules are limited is noteworthy. Bucky goes out of his way to assist other clinics when they need extra support. His ability to multi-task and his communication skills are recognized by his supervisors and are impressive to most.



JUNE – MARCIA PETE Clinic Travel Specialist, Stebbins. Marcia stands out for many reasons. With such a demanding position in her community, she remains pleasant and reliable, even after decades on the job. Always punctual, Marcia’s work ethic is second to none. Because of her routine reliability, there is no doubt that patients will receive the service they need and deserve. Marcia’s length of experience is invaluable, as she is able to answer questions and find solutions quickly.



JULY – GABRIEL STENЕК Patient Travel Clerk, Nome. Gabriel has left a mark on NSHC in a short time. With a firm grasp on cultural values, including respect for Elders, he has earned appreciation from many. Gabriel’s kind and genuine personality is a great asset to the Patient Travel team, where patience and customer service are highly important skills. With busy and time-consuming work, this employee still manages to graciously answer questions and work through complications with a helpful attitude.



AUGUST – VICTORIA STUBBS Patient Accounts Representative, Nome. Victoria is someone you may find in different places throughout the hospital at different times of the day, depending on the needs of Patient Registration. With commendable dedication, she remains professional and polite, no matter the situation. Being at the frontline of healthcare, Victoria encounters patients who have scheduled appointments or who may be in urgent situations and who have seen better days. Still, she makes sure their position is covered, often stepping in for employees who cannot, no matter what shift or location.



SEPTEMBER – JANA SCHUERCH Dental Office Manager, Nome. Jana is described as helpful, organized, and amazing. Since she started in her role, coworkers have noted the difference and say they don’t know how their office would run without her. Jana is excellent with patients and customer service, and she all-around connects with the community. While she excels in her own role, her work ensures that others are able to excel in theirs as well.

Beverly Tran promoted to Medical Services AVP

Last summer, Norton Sound Health Corporation happily added another home-grown leader to the Administration team. NSHC promoted Beverly Tran to the new role of assistant vice president of Medical Services. The position is a mentorship opportunity to gain healthcare administration experience for succession planning at NSHC.

Tran started work at NSHC about five years ago in the role of Medical Staff coordinator. She was promoted to Medical Staff program manager less than a year later and has been a part of the department’s growth, which has tripled the number of its employees during that time. Tran was awarded NSHC Manager of the Year for 2022.

Dr. Mark Peterson, NSHC medical director, has only positive things to say about Tran.

“Her demeanor is always cheerful. Her customer service is outstanding. I don’t know a single individual from the Medical Staff who does not hold her in high esteem,” he said. “She also carefully watches the corporation from the aspect of a customer-owner and uses her role as manager of the Medical Staff program to make improvements that are needed.”

Tran says she looks forward to putting her knowledge and experience to use in her new role.

“I feel, in this new position, I can use my skills to continue serving the people of our great region,” she said.

Tran was raised in Nome and is the daughter of Jamie Horton and Gerald Krier. She is married to Brendon Gologergen-Tran and has three children: Gabriel, Abner, and Jeffrey.

Tran received her associate degree in applied arts and science with a concentration in administrative management from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in December 2021. She is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in inter-

disciplinary studies with a concentration in healthcare administration. Before joining NSHC, Tran worked for Bering Straits Development Company, Credit Union 1, and the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

As AVP of Medical Services, Tran will continue to coordinate and manage all administrative aspects of the Medical Staff department in partnership with Dr. Peterson, while also taking on new leadership duties within Administration.



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Shedding some light on seasonal depression

In western Alaska, the onset of winter causes a drastic change in all living things each year. Daylight is minimized to as few as four hours on the darkest days of the year, with the sun barely leaving the horizon line as it simultaneously rises and sets.

The extended periods of darkness can disrupt a person’s natural circadian rhythm, also known as their internal clock.

As the days grow shorter, critters like snowshoe hares, ermine, and ptarmigan begin to release hormones that causes them to change color. Birds have complicated neurons called photoreceptors that allow their brains to know when to grow flight feathers, and when to begin the long journey to their winter vacation homes. Domestic laying hens slow egg production, compelling farmers to provide artificial light on an automatic timer to mimic 12 hours of daylight.

Like these animals, humans have not escaped the effects of limited daylight, making Alaskans ten times

more likely to be diagnosed with a type of depression known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD) than people living outside of Alaska, according to a capstone study from the University of Denver. Some key physical changes are vitamin D deficiency, reduced serotonin (also known as the happiness hormone) and increased melatonin (also known as the sleep hormone).

Some common symptoms of SAD include hopelessness, persistent sadness, irritability, tiredness, difficulty concentrating, and social withdrawal. Tragically, seasonal depression is also partially responsible for a high suicide rate, drug abuse, and alcoholism in rural Alaska.

Thankfully, SAD is manageable through lifestyle changes, along with methods like light therapy, talk therapy, and medication.

Ward Walker, a Behavioral Health Services clinician in Stebbins, has lived in the region full-time for the past 10 years. Once affected by seasonal depression, he has found that consistent self-care can correct any symptoms.

“I feel really healthy, lots of energy and good mood,” he said. “I stay positive through most daily challenges and difficulties. My job is fairly stressful with helping people through hard times, so that’s important.”

He attributes his good health to getting eight hours of sleep each night, having a bright light set on a timer to wake him up each morning, practicing mindfulness, exercising regularly, taking vitamin D supplements, eating a balanced diet, and avoiding sugar and caffeine.

“If after making these changes you still have SAD, go to the clinic and see a professional,” Walker urged. “This is basic self-care to have a good quality of life living where we do. All people who live here need to learn these tricks to thrive and be happy, strong, healthy and in a good mood.”

Sarah Swartz, a licensed practical nurse at Primary Care Clinic, believes that her depression intensified 17 years ago when she first moved to Alaska.

“My symptoms seem to begin in September when we see the signs that summer is over: the tundra’s changing colors, the drop in temperature, the decrease in daylight hours,” said Swartz. “I think it is partly due to not feeling like I have accomplished all I wanted to do during the summer months.”

Swartz is an advocate of being open about men-



Photo and painting: Sarah Swartz

During the winter months, Sarah Swartz spends time indoors painting. She says art really helps with her seasonal depression. Pictured here is one of her paintings of a red salmon swimming upriver on a warm summer afternoon.

tal health issues. In addition to going to therapy, she finds that it helps to stay active at home by crafting, especially with friends. She and her family enjoy going on rides in the country for small game hunting when the weather allows. She also has a light therapy lamp in her office, which helps to regulate and alleviate the effects of reduced sunlight exposure.

“I try my hardest to keep in touch with my friends and family as much as possible. The very best thing that helps is being able to express my feelings in a safe environment with my closest friends and family. Having a strong and safe support system at home has been the most beneficial for me,” she said.

If you are interested in trying light therapy to help you through the darkest months of the year, the Nome pharmacy currently stocks UV-free lamps. The lights are available for free after a referral from a wellness check-up with your primary care provider or through BHS, or they can be purchased for \$25. The pharmacy can be reached at 907-443-3319. These lights can also be shipped to village patients.

Mental health tips for the winter months

1. Get outside while it’s light out! Even 15 minutes can improve your mood and energy.
2. Get enough sleep every night. Limit screen time before bed to help your brain wind down.
3. Eat a healthy, nutritious diet and drink plenty of water. Limit sugar intake.
4. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. Go for a walk, lift weights, or sign up for a group fitness class.
5. Spend time with friends and family. Talking to someone you trust can make all the difference.

SOME REASONS TO CALL, TEXT, AND CHAT 988

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

- Trauma
- Thoughts of suicide
- Feeling depressed or anxious
- Drinking too much or drug use

Shishmaref family welcomes NSHC’s first baby of 2024

Norton Sound Health Corporation’s first baby of 2024 waited until the early morning hours of January 5 to make his entrance.

Raiden Kade Azrgaiyaq Sockpick was born at 1:25 a.m. at Norton Sound Regional Hospital in Nome.

Ida Sockpick of Shishmaref had been waiting in Nome to deliver and had been experiencing contractions for a couple of days. On the evening of January 4, she went to the hospital and, with Dr. Jacquelyn Serrano’s help, Sockpick delivered her baby boy several hours later.

Raiden weighed 7 pounds and 9 ounces and measured 21 inches long. He is Sockpick and James Barr’s third child, brother to Frederick, 9, and Analeese, 7.

“We were all happy to have him,” Sockpick said, but noted that Analeese was especially excited. “She didn’t



Photos courtesy of Ida Sockpick

want to leave the hospital.”

But Barr put the kids to bed on Jan. 4, and when they awoke the following morning, their first stop after a quick breakfast was meeting their baby brother.

Raiden is grandson to Roy and Helen Sockpick and to Donna Barr and John Weyiouanna. His Inupiaq name is after Sockpick’s grandfather, Davis Sockpick.



Photo: Reba Leon

Health fair educates Nomeites

The Nome Health Fair was held at the Nome Recreation Center on January 25. Nearly 20 vendors circled the gymnasium floor with healthcare or wellness resources for visitors. With a bingo theme, participants were encouraged to visit every booth and be entered to win prizes when they were through. Organized by the NSHC CAMP department, the fair greeted over 100 participants, including a large group of high school seniors who took a bus from school to take part in the event.