

# the council

Vol. 44, No. 9

A REPORT TO THE MEMBER TRIBES OF TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

September 2019



## State of Education

The Education Summit on August 2nd kicked off with welcoming remarks by Chief/Chairman Victor Joseph who highlighted the importance of meeting to discuss educational issues in this imperiled budgetary environment and was followed by Representative Grier Hopkins who serves on the House Education Committee. Rep. Hopkins spoke about the budget battles in the Legislature and about the next steps moving forward in this uncertain

environment. The Summit featured the President of the University of Alaska, Dr. Jim Johnsen, the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Michael Johnson, Superintendents from across the interior, and educational agencies in a variety of fields.

All of the speakers gave updates on their sectors, and many spoke about the Governor's vetoes, and the budgetary impacts of those actions. There were serious projections and

timelines delivered by the President of the University, and the threats to the programs and services that we've come to expect from the University of Alaska.

The Commissioner of Education spoke of the importance of Tribally Compacting schools, and



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## TCC Summit & Full Board of Directors Meeting



November 14-15, 2019 • Chief David Salmon Tribal Hall • Fairbanks, AK

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## MISSION STATEMENT

Tanana Chiefs Conference provides a unified voice in advancing sovereign tribal governments through the promotion of physical and mental wellness, education, socioeconomic development, and culture of the Interior Alaska Native people.

## VISION

Healthy, Strong, Unified Tribes



Tanana  
Chiefs  
Conference

## TCC EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

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Peter Demoski/Nulato  
*Elder Advisor*

Jolie Murray/Beaver  
*Youth Advisor*

## CHIEF'S REPORT

Dear Tribes and Tribal Members,



September is upon us and I hope everyone was able to put away enough fish. For those going hunting, good luck and please be safe! If out on a boat remember to wear your life jacket and always practice firearm safety.

Governor Dunleavy has announced his final decisions on the state operating budget, again vetoing funding for Medicaid, public broadcasting, public assistance, VPSO, and more, while agreeing to add money back to senior benefits, Head Start, and the University of Alaska. The Permanent Fund dividend amount was also announced and is set at \$1,600. Governor Dunleavy plans to seek a third special session to discuss a supplemental dividend payment.

The Recall Dunleavy effort was successful in garnering enough signatures to satisfy the first phase of the process. Over 30,000 signatures have been collected and the application will be headed to the Division of Elections for certification on September 5th. There will also be a legal review from the Department of Law to determine if the grounds for recall that the group has cited are sufficient. It is possible that the state will not approve the grounds and it is expected that the Recall Dunleavy group will file suit to proceed. If successful via the Division of Elections and the Department of Law, or through a court challenge, the second phase of collecting 71,000 signatures begins which will require all that had previous signed to sign again.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in our 2019 Education Summit last month. This year's theme was "State of Education". Attendees heard from superintendents from around the state including Iditarod Area School District Connie Newman, Fairbanks North Star Borough School District Dr. Karen Gaborik, and Alaska Gateway School District Scott MacManus. as University of Alaska President Dr. James Johnson spoke to the group as well. Many others presented on topics such as current graduation rates, dropout rates, education cuts, and more. You can learn more about the event on the front page of this newsletter.

On July 30th, the Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) had the opportunity to visit Rampart and Hughes accompanied by TCC Vice President Charlene Stern and key staff. Community members were able to discuss their concerns about the Power Cost Equalization, lack of response from law enforcement, and more. The TIBC meeting was held July 31st - August 2nd at the Westmark Hotel in Fairbanks. Local tribes were able to attend the meeting to see how business was conducted, as TIBC is responsible for making funding recommendations for the BIA budget for all tribes nationally. TCC had the honor of hosting a welcome potlatch for the TIBC on August 1st at the David Salmon Tribal Hall. Alaska Tribal Unity passed resolution 2018-14 Supporting the Rights of Tribes to appoint their own Regional Representative to TIBC.

TCC will be hosting a Summit & Special Full Board of Director's Meeting on November 13-14th at the Westmark Hotel. Discussion will focus on Behavioral Health and Hunting Fishing Task Force. In the afternoon on the 14th, we will call to order to consider the Behavioral Health and Hunting Fishing Task Force strategy. In addition, as directed by Resolution 2019-02 "Random drug testing for the Executive & Health Advisory Board" a policy will be presented for consideration. I look forward to seeing you all there as we strive to maintain our vision of Healthy, Strong, Unified Tribes.

Ana Bassee,  
Victor Joseph  
Chief/Chairman



## Education Summit *Continued*

By Edward Alexander  
Education Manager

learning to read in our Native Languages “we want kids to read by grade three, that doesn’t mean read in English, that means read, period. That could be, should be, also in our Native languages.” Explained Commissioner Johnson.

Superintendents Connie Newman of the Iditarod Area School District, Patrick Manning of the Nenana City Schools, Dr. Karen Garborik of the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District and Scott MacManus of the Alaska Gateway School District all attended and presented, as well as participated in a panel question and answer session. There were impassioned pleas for folks to “get involved with the process and send legislators messages” from Superintendent MacManus of the Alaska Gateway School District. Superintendent Newman stressed the need for more Native Educators and the stability and quality that they bring to the classroom. All of the Superintendents across the region were invited and we were honored to host those that attended.

We also saw two outstanding presentations on Native Language Revitalization from Stephanie Hinz of the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments and from Allan Hayton and Nathan Feemster with Doyon Foundation’s “Doyon Languages Online” program. Both projects showed the dynamic intersection of pairing elders with technical experts in creative and fun ways, and generated fantastic learning tools. We highly recommend that beneficiaries visit their respective webpages to view these Native Language revitalization materials that are fun, hip, and informative.

Agencies from across the interior presented from the Fairbanks Correctional Center to the Rural Alaska Honors Institute, from the President of the National Education Association Alaska to our own Jennifer Russell in TCC Head Start. The Literacy Council of Alaska’s Executive Director Michael Kolasa talked about the importance of GED’s, and the LCA’s GED services

to families across the interior. Linda Setterberg with BRIDGES, and the Fairbanks Re-entry Coalition, detailed efforts to help incarcerated prisoners transition successfully back into regular civilian life. Sandi Ryan, President of Fairbanks Education Association, made the attendees complete a lesson, and fill out a survey all while laying out the important work FEA is involved in. Dr. Arleigh Reynolds of the BLAST program emphasized that the unique scholarships and BLAST program was designed to benefit rural, and Alaska Native students in particular and he would like to see even more participation on that front.

All of these dynamic presentations and more were all web-streamed across the region live. The agenda and Annual TCC Education Report are all available online at Tanana Chiefs Conference’s website, and we look forward to even greater participation next year!



## Submit your *Photos* for our 2020 Calendar!

Send us your photos to be featured in the Tanana Chiefs Conference annual calendar! Help us celebrate the people, culture, and land of Interior Alaska by submitting your best photos. Don’t forget to include a caption!

**DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 18TH, 2019**

Send your photos to  
[communications\\_dept@tananachiefs.org](mailto:communications_dept@tananachiefs.org)







# McGRATH

## Culture & Wellness Camp

The McGrath Culture and Wellness Camp was held August 5-9, 2019, 24 miles up the Kuskokwim River from McGrath.

There were 35 participants from around the Upper Kuskokwim subregion.

Cultural activities at the camp included beading and sewing, spear making, fish cutting, traditional drumming and dancing, learning

about healing plants, and traditional storytelling. Several TCC staff also attended to cover various wellness topics including the harms of tobacco, making good choices, and bullying.

Through these camps, the participants spend time with their local Elders and learn about their families, culture, history, language.

These camps aide in giving our youth a strong foundation as they

move forward in their lives and help to strengthen their self-identity.

Tribes throughout the region continue to host Culture and Wellness Camps funded through Tanana Chief's Conference and the Administration for Native Americans.

Two camps will be hosted in each subregion with the hope that locals will continue with camps.







## 2019 Culture & Wellness Camp Schedule

### Lower Yukon

- Shageluk - August 27-29
- Anvik - Postponed - TBD

### Upper Tanana

- Tanacross - June 17-21
- Healy Lake - Dates TBD

### Yukon Koyukuk

- Galena - Dates TBD
- Koyukuk - September 1-7

### Upper Kuskokwim

- McGrath - August 5-9
- Takotna - TBD

### Yukon Flats

- Circle - August 12-16
- Birch Creek - August 29-September 3

### Yukon Tanana

- Rampart - July 24-27
- Nenana - August 19-23



# Tribal Interior Budget Council *Meeting*

The Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) met July 31-August 2nd at the Westmark Hotel in Fairbanks. Chief/Chairman had the opportunity to give a short welcome at the start of the meeting.

This meeting gave tribes a chance to attend the meetings



to see how their business is conducted as TIBC is responsible for making funding recommendations for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) budget.

TCC hosted a welcome potlatch on August 1st at the Chief David Salmon Tribal Hall. The Alaska Tribal Unity passed

resolution 2018-14 Resolution Supporting the Rights of Tribes to appoint their own Regional Representative to TIBC. Staff have met with and provided the BIA Region Director Eugene Peltola, Jr. this resolution. He has forwarded the request to Assistant Secretary Tara Sweeney for approval to change how TIBC members are selected in Alaska.



## Rampart/Hughes Visit

On July 30th, TCC key staff and BIA representatives visited Rampart and Hughes to meet with community members and discuss concerns in their communities.



## ELSIE PITKA, BEAVER

"My first memory was riding inside a big sled," remembers Pitka, picturing caribou and warm blankets she had been wrapped in. "My mom was on the handlebar, and my father was way out, walking ahead of the dogs."

Pitka spent most of her time living with her grandparents out on the trap line. "We lived out in the woods, we don't live in town," says Pitka. "I never see a house." Pitka estimates that her grandparents were in their 90's. She would bring them tea or water, or even go out and getting wood to keep the fire going. "My grandma and my grandpa is the most important thing in my life." she says.

After her grandmother died, her grandfather and her walked to Beaver. "I don't know how many miles, maybe 80 miles." says Pitka. It was only one or two months later that Pitka's grandfather also passed, leaving her without the two most important people in her life.

James Pitka, a famous violin player who was deaf in both ears, moved to Beaver. He had children, one of whom was a boy named Elman Pitka. "We got married pretty young," says Pitka. After they married, they moved to fish camp where Pitka eventually learned how to cut fish from her Uncle Kilburn. Elman and Elsie had thirteen children together.

Despite the hardships that Pitka has experienced in her life, she continues to find ways to celebrate life and pass on her knowledge.

"One of my favorite things to do is go fiddle dancing," says Pitka, "James Pitka, he used to play all night until the morning - jig, square dance, and duck dance."

To hear Elsie's full story, visit [www.tananachiefs.org](http://www.tananachiefs.org)



TCC's Legacy of our Elders series documents the lives and stories of Athabascan elders throughout the TCC region. Their interviews are compiled into volumes that include a DVD movie as well as an accompanying book. The books and DVDs highlight the elders and the stories that they want to share. These videos are available on our website at [www.tananachiefs.org](http://www.tananachiefs.org)

Funding for Legacy Project made possible by TCC & The National Park Service.

# September is National **SUICIDE AWARENESS** Month

National Suicide Prevention Month is an annual observance held in September to highlight the importance of knowing the warning signs and all of us here at Tanana Chiefs Conference want to provide you with some great educational materials that could **SAVE YOUR LIFE**. Suicide has direct impact on all of our communities and community members. Remember, it is OK to reach out and get involved in preventing suicide in your community.

If you or someone you know is showing signs of suicide, get help **now**.

## WARNING SIGNS

Someone who is thinking about suicide will usually give some clues also known as suicide warning signs to those around them to show that they are troubled. Suicide prevention starts with recognising these warning signs and treating them seriously.

It is likely that a suicidal person will display a combination of these signs rather than one single sign

- Become depressed or withdrawn
- Suddenly appears to be fine after being depressed.
- Behaving recklessly.
- Getting Affairs in order.
- Giving away valued possessions
- Showing marked change in behavior, attitude or appearance
- Abusing drugs or alcohol.
- Suffering from a major loss or life change
- Previous suicide attempts.

## WHAT TO DO

Talking to a friend or family member about their suicidal thoughts and feelings can be extremely difficult. But if you're unsure whether someone is suicidal, the best way to find out is to ask.

***Here are some things you can say to start the conversation about suicide:***

- I am worried about you because you haven't seemed yourself lately.
- I noticed that you have been doing (state behavior), is everything OK?

***Questions you can ask:***

- What can I do to help you?
- Do you have something that you can talk to for support?

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE.  
PLEASE REACH OUT. WE CAN HELP.**

**TCC Behavioral Health:** (907) 452-8251 After-House Crisis: 1 (800) 478-6682

**Alaska Careline:** 1 (877) 266- HELP (4357) or text "4help" to 839863 Tues-Sat, 3pm-11pm

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1 (800) 273-8255

For more information and resources on suicide prevention please contact  
TCC Wellness Project Staff at (907) 452-8251 or 1 (800) 478-6822



# 2019 Subregional Meetings

TCC Chief Victor Joseph TCC leadership have been busy attending subregional meetings throughout the region.

These meetings are important, as they provide TCC the opportunity to hear about the needs and concerns of our tribes, and learn ways we can

assist.

The meetings include discussions on the state budget cuts, with a focus on Power Cost Equalization (PCE), VPSO program, Head Start, Senior Benefits, and funding for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). As well as other topics important to

our communities.

Subregionals include the Lower Yukon in Anvik, Yukon Tanana in Nenana, Upper Kuskokwim in McGrath, Upper Tanana in Tanacross, Yukon Flats in Circle, and Yukon Koyukuk in Galena.

## Lower Yukon *Anvik*



## Upper Kuskokwim *McGrath*



## Yukon Tanana *Nenana*



## Upper Tanana *Tanacross*



## Hunting Safety *Tips*

Now that Hunting Season is upon us, we would like to remind everyone to stay safe! Below we have compiled a few hunting safety tips for those who will be going out this month:

- Always wear a life jacket when travelling on the waterways
- Never go hunting without telling someone where you are going and when you expect to return
- Be sure to stock your boat or four-wheeler with safety gear; first aid kits, ropes, flare gun, hand axe, etc.
- Treat every gun as if it is loaded, even when you are sure it is not
- Before each hunt, open your gun's action and check the muzzle for obstructions
- Wear bright clothing or reflective gear when hunting, that way other hunters can be aware when you are nearby





# Corn - the Holy Grail of Alaska Gardeners

By Heidi Rader  
Tribes Extension Educator, TCC

Growing corn in Alaska is a pain in the neck. If you're lucky, the summer is hot and you get a few ears. If you're not lucky, and the summer is cold and rainy, you get zilch. Either way, a lot of effort and garden space goes into your attempts with mixed results.

Still, Alaska gardeners' eyes light up when you talk about growing corn in a way you don't see when you mention, say, kale, which is so much more reliable, nutritious and higher-yielding. Maybe part of the allure of growing corn is the challenge. Or maybe that it's about 10 times sweeter than kale.

If you get a twinkle in your eye when you hear corn-growing talk, here are some things you should know.

First, you will want to choose a variety that matures in around 70 days or less. You'll also want to consider the genetics of the corn variety you're selecting and not just for curiosity's sake. It's important for predicting cold hardiness, sweetness, seedling vigor (in cold soils), the shelf life or rate that sugar turns to starch and isolation requirements. I'm not going to lie, it's a little bit confusing, but this article ([bit.ly/31aclGI](http://bit.ly/31aclGI)) and, especially the accompanying table ([bit.ly/2wBrMJZ](http://bit.ly/2wBrMJZ)), do a great job of delineating the corn by their genetic traits. This table also provides a comparison of sweet corn types ([bit.ly/2KuDZbG](http://bit.ly/2KuDZbG)).

For Alaska, synergistic varieties are a good bet. They are tasty, have vigorous seedlings and a long shelf life. In corn with longer shelf lives, the sugar is not converted to starch right away as opposed to normal (Su) sugar corn, which basically has no shelf life. Of course when you grow your own corn in

Alaska, you're probably not going to be harvesting so much that you need to store it — you can pick it and plop it on the table directly.

But if you did want to grow a large area of corn (i.e. if you're a farmer), then you might want to consider shelf life. Sugary enhanced (Se) corn has a better shelf life than normal (Su) corn and a creamy, tender texture that some consider mushy. In general, I would stay away from the super sweet types or other types with lower seedling vigor and longer days to maturity.

In our 2018 preliminary corn trials in Fairbanks ([bit.ly/2QxV0Cz](http://bit.ly/2QxV0Cz)), we noted a few distinctions between varieties, but this fall we'll have more robust data to share. Early Sunglow and Earlivee, both Su (normal sugary) varieties, lived up to their names and were the earliest.

They produced decent yields of more than 8.6 and 7 pounds per 10-foot plot, respectively. Cafe corn (synergistic) had the highest overall yield overall at 14.2 pounds, followed by Sugar Pearl (sugary enhanced, Se). In taste trials, Sweetness ranked highest (5 of 5 for taste and 4 of 5 for texture), but Legend, Espresso, Spring Treat and Sugar Buns weren't far behind with ratings of 4 of 5 for taste and texture.

There are several ways to give corn a jump start and optimize its chances for maturity in our short growing season. If direct-seeding, plant seeds about 8 to 12 inches apart in rows 30 to 36 inches apart around mid-May.

You can plant at ground level, but I've heard some people use a bulb planter to dig a hole that allows the plant a few inches of growth before hitting the clear plastic that you'll want to cover your seeds with after you plant them. When the plants are about 6 inches tall (taller if you planted them in a hole), cut slits into the plastic to allow the plants to emerge. Leave the plastic on the corn throughout the summer. Be forewarned — clear plastic will also help your weeds grow.

Alternatively, start seeds indoors 2 to 4 weeks before transplanting outside around May 15 to June 1 into a plastic mulch (preferably one like infrared transmitting mulch that acts as a soil warmer and weed barrier). Keep frost cloth handy if you plant closer to May 15 or cover the seedlings with additional, clear plastic supported by wire hoops until the corn outgrows it.

Don't plant just one row of corn. Plant in a square or block to improve cross-pollination. Corn needs a lot of water and a lot of fertilizer. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses are the easiest way to water plants under plastic mulch. Watch your corn and note the date when about half of the corn has tasseled (half-silk date). They should be ready to harvest about 2 to 3 weeks after the half-silk date if the moose don't get there first. Although this article is from Extension in Minnesota, it gives some additional tips on growing sweet corn ([bit.ly/2WLP7Mt](http://bit.ly/2WLP7Mt)).

I won't waste my limited garden space on growing corn, but if you want to, go right ahead and be the envy of other Alaska gardeners.



Questions about gardening? Contact Heidi at [Heidi.Rader@tananachiefs.org](mailto:Heidi.Rader@tananachiefs.org) or 452-8251 x 3477





# Community Health Aide Program trains Health Aides for *Rural Alaska*

By Nancy Tarnai  
Communications, TCC



In less than four years, 105 students have been trained to serve the health needs of rural communities through TCC's Community Health Aide Program (CHAP). Prior to TCC opening the training center in Fairbanks, people had to complete their studies in Anchorage, Nome or Bethel and endure long waits to get into a program.

"We are preparing our health aides to meet the medical needs of our communities," said Victor Joseph, TCC Chief/Chairman. "In the past we had a shortage of health aides and it was taking several years to get them to the level that would meet the health care needs of the communities they serve. In 2015 with 11 of 23 clinics having no trained health aide, the executive board decided to invest in a certified health aide training center to expedite the process."

Becoming a health aide starts with the recommendation of the local Tribal Council. TCC then works with the applicant to ensure a minimum math and language comprehension. Once hired, a health aide will start the journey of training including emergency medical services certification then four basic health aide sessions. The four sessions are separated by on the job experience, with health aides working at home treating patients in the village clinics. This is supported through an extensive network of field supervisors providing ongoing training and mentoring as well as daily contact from an assigned primary care provider to discuss individual patients. It can take a year and a half to 4 years to complete all levels of health aide training.

"It's very hands-on training," explained Faith Walsh, Community Health Aide Training Center manager.

Due to a partnership with Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center, CHAP students get actual work experience under primary care providers while in town for their training. "It's rewarding to keep these relationships going," Walsh said. Students also get ride-along experience with a local air ambulance company.

Health aides are just as vital today as they were 50 years ago in ensuring access to health care services in rural communities. Not only are they on-call for emergencies 365 days/year, 24 hours/day, 7 days/week- they provide preventive care, routine services, and chronic care follow up. "They are primary caregivers with a high level of skill," Walsh said. "They do amazing work. They are unsung heroes to me."

There is a big responsibility of being a health care provider for a community with only a few weeks of training. Being on-call, maybe by yourself for extended periods of time. Responding to the stressful and traumatic events of your family and friends takes a toll on everyone. These stresses can add up quickly and can lead to early burn out. Managing the stress and taking care of yourself becomes a very the most important objective a health aide can do for a long career as a health aide.

Community health aides are unique to Alaska and unique within Alaska because they only work within the Alaska Tribal Health System. This system was created out of a need over 50 years ago to ensure access to health care in the most remote parts of the state.

TCC wants to continue to meet the need of basic training so no community has to wait months for a new hire to receive health aide training. Our ultimate goal is ensuring access to quality health care services in the unique system of care. Walsh's goals for the TCC CHAP training center are to offer distance learning so health

aides can continue their education or take refresher courses from home and to add more simulation training.

We get to celebrate with training journey with our health aides after they complete session IV with a graduation ceremony. With their family in attendance, we take time to recognize them as members of their communities, their success with training and the incredibly honorable role they accepted as a health aide.

During this ceremony, they are presented white coats, recognized with guest speakers and afterwards enjoy some traditional foods. "It's so rewarding to recognize them and give kudos for them," Walsh said.

Chief Victor Joseph said the program has been very successful. "We've been able to not only provide access to services but get health aides trained to higher levels more quickly ensuring they can offer the full scope of practice a health aide can provide."

"We honor the role of the health aide and recognize those who have served and those who continue working in their communities. For some, becoming a health aide is so intriguing they continue their training in other fields such as nursing, physician assistant or physician," he said. "I hear a lot of stories about how important health aides are to our communities. We will continue to work with our communities to ensuring health aide positions are filled and we are able to provide the highest quality of training and health care."

"The health aides are the first responders, eyes, hands and ears for physicians 100's of miles away. Their level of commitment to this job is great."

If you are interested in applying to be a health aide you can go to the Tanana Chiefs Conference website or contact an individual Tribal Council. The staff at TCC are happy to answer any questions you might have, 1-907-452-8251 ext. 3401





# First Gwich'in Steering Committee International Youth Council Convenes to Prepare Emerging Leaders for Protecting Sacred Lands and the Gwich'in Way of Life

By Rina Kowalski  
Gwich'in Steering Committee

The Gwich'in Steering Committee International Youth Council gathered in Fairbanks, AK, August 16th-19th, 2019 for their first board meeting and training.

Founded in 1988, the Gwich'in Steering Committee is the unified voice of the Gwich'in Nation

speaking out to protect the calving grounds of porcupine caribou herd. For over 40,000 years the Gwich'in have had a cultural and spiritual connection to the porcupine caribou.

During the training, the Youth Council learned about their history

and their connection to the caribou. The GSC Board of Directors felt it was important to educate and update our younger generation on the importance of protecting the caribou, the arctic, and the Gwich'in way of life.



## Community Health Aide

**Rochelle Bifelt, Health Aide, Mary C. Demientieff Health Clinic, Nenana**

Growing up in Huslia, Rochelle Bifelt always enjoyed helping people but didn't realize that she could have a career doing just that.

When she decided to apply for a job as a health aide at the Mary C. Demientieff Health Clinic in Nenana in 2014, she was nervous. "It was a huge deal to me," she said. "But I decided to go for it and I got the job."

Bifelt waited two years for a training slot to open in Anchorage, Nome or Bethel, all the while doing administrative tasks at the clinic. When Tanana Chiefs Conference opened CHAP it was a tremendous relief for Bifelt because it was so much closer to home than the other options.

"It was hard to think about being in

Anchorage or Nome, being that far away from my kids," she said. "Knowing that my kids were an hour away made all the difference for me. I'm really happy they opened that training center for us."

At first the classes were intense, but Bifelt worked hard and adjusted. "I retained the knowledge and it helped me become more skilled," she said.

She encourages friends and acquaintances interested in health care careers to look into CHAP, no matter their age. "People think they can't do it because they have no medical experience but they just need to be willing to learn."

Her role at the Nenana clinic is to help with everything from scheduling to well child exams to acute problems and chronic care. Sometimes she travels to other villages to fill in when positions are vacant. "I love traveling and helping," Bifelt said. She has been to Hughes, Nulato, Circle, Huslia, Koyukuk, Kaltag, Tanana and Ruby. "That's one of the

things I love about my job; there are so many opportunities and so much support. "There's no better feeling in life than to truly help someone," Bifelt said. "When I hear people say thank you to me for helping and I see the relief they have when they feel better, that's beautiful." Bifelt's goals are to get her kids through school and send them to college and to continue her education by working toward becoming a physician's assistant.

In her free time, Bifelt enjoys being with her children, watching movies and learning new projects. She keeps busy making kuspiks and doing beading repairs on family members' slippers.

Faith Walsh, CHAP training center manager, praised Bifelt for her lack of fear in asking questions and always wanting to do better for her patients. "She has an excellent bedside manner," Walsh said. "You can see her dedication; she is committed to her community."



# START SCHOOL OFF RIGHT WITH A DENTAL EXAM

By Barb O'Donnell  
Dental Hygienist, TCC

Even though summers seem too short for the many activities and opportunities Alaska presents, the turning of the seasons is always on our minds.

Fall will be a time to finish processing subsistence harvests and for many of us a time to watch children and grandchildren return to classes. School has a grounding effect and gives us focus towards different activities and structure.

Many families have been spending a lot of time gathering and preparing for the upcoming winter and sometimes consistent oral hygiene is on the back burner. Tooth decay and cavities usually take more than just a summer to develop, however, staying in touch with the dentist for an exam, cleaning, sealants and fluoride

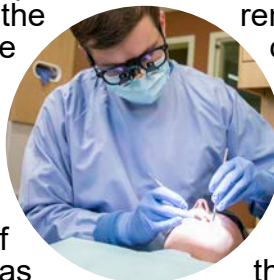
treatment is a good way to catch problems early and prevent deeper breakdown and cavities.

Pop and sports drinks are convenience foods and a quick fix for thirst and energy in the summer. Some people drink a lot of soda and sugary drinks to quench thirst. If this has been a habit, acid attacks can do a lot more damage to enamel in a short period of time. Try to choose water as your source of hydration when possible. And get that dental exam with x-rays to identify cavities that can't be seen.

Gingivitis only takes a few days to develop. Plaque bacteria consistently left near the gums or between teeth will start to irritate

and infect the gums. At the dental exam and cleaning we can help identify the problem areas where plaque is being left behind after brushing. This will be a great visual reminder of how to brush correctly to get the most "bang for your brushing".

So with the change of seasons and the start of school, be reminded to give us a call and we will get you and your family on the exam list. Students who do not have toothaches or oral pain are less likely to be distracted in school by that pain, bad breath will be kept to a minimum and smiles will be healthier for the upcoming school season.



## Are *You* Covered?

By Rhonda Lohrke  
Patient Health Resource Representative, TCC

### What is Tribally-Sponsored Health Insurance?

Tribes and Tribal health organizations now pay for health insurance for Alaska Native and American Indian people who qualify. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) is offering Tribally-Sponsored Health Insurance in Alaska.

### Will Tribal-Sponsored Health Insurance Cost me anything?

No. ANTHC pays the monthly insurance premium cost. Alaska Native and American Indian people also do not have to pay any co-payments or deductibles when you are seen or referred by Tribal health facilities.

### Why should I have Tribally-Sponsored Health Insurance?

Health insurance can help make more services available for you and all Alaska Native and American Indian people. Health insurance can also help you receive medical care when you are traveling or away from Tribal health facilities.

### How do I qualify?

You and your family can get Tribally-Sponsored Health Insurance if you:

- Are a resident of the State of Alaska
- Are eligible for services at a Tribal health clinic/facility
- Are not covered or eligible for Medicare Part A, Medicaid (Denali Care), Denali KidCare, TRICARE, CHAMPVA, or affordable health insurance through

an employer

- Estimate your 2019 income will be within the guidelines below

### Income Guidelines for Eligibility

If your Family has	Must be Above	Must be Below
1 Person	\$15,180/yr	\$60,720/yr
2 People	\$20,580/yr	\$82,320/yr
3 People	\$25,980/yr	\$103,920/yr
4 People*	\$31,380/yr	\$125,520/yr

\*Amounts continue to increase for larger families.

### Does this affect my current Alaska Native Health benefits?

No. You will always first and foremost be a beneficiary of Indian Health Service, Tribal hospitals and health clinics throughout Alaska and the United States. Tribally-sponsored health insurance is an added health care benefit. You should use the Tribal Health System to ensure that your health care needs are being met and that you are as healthy as possible.

### How can I get more information and sign up?

Contact TCC Alternate Health Resources Department at 907-451-6682: Rhonda Lohrke (ext. 3707); or Iris Molnar (ext. 3546) to see if you are eligible.

You may also contact the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium at 907-729-7777 or 1-855-882-6842, [sponsorship@anthc.org](mailto:sponsorship@anthc.org) or [www.anthc.org/tship](http://www.anthc.org/tship).



# International Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) Day

By Amanda Race, MA, CRC, Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program Manager

September 9th is International Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) Day. People world wide have set aside this day to commemorate the lives of those who experience the effects of alcohol consumed by their mother during pregnancy. **These children and adults are at risk for minor and major learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and physical birth defects of the heart and other vital organs.** Individuals who experience these difficulties are characterized by the diagnosis FAS (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) or the term FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders).

## Facts About Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

### **FASD is 100% preventable**

If you are pregnant or could get pregnant- don't drink alcohol. No woman intends to injure her baby, but damage can be done before a woman knows that she is pregnant.

### **FASD is the leading known cause of brain damage.**

The damage caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol can cause problems with learning, behavioral control, language development, problem solving and judgment.

### **Alcohol causes more damage to babies than any other drug.**

No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy. The brain is the only organ that develops throughout the entire pregnancy, making it particularly vulnerable to alcohol.

### **For the majority of those affected, FASD is an invisible birth defect.**

An individual with FASD may look their age, but may function intellectually and emotionally younger than their years.

### **FASD is found in all socioeconomic groups and in all races.** Wherever women drink, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum disorders exist.

### **The cost of lost human potential related to FASD is immeasurable.**

The cost of providing services to an individual with FASD has been estimated to be between \$1.5 -2 million dollars over their lifetime. However, there is also a larger cost to families and society at large.

### **FASD lasts a lifetime.**

The damage caused by prenatal alcohol exposure is permanent, but individuals and families who receive proper evaluations and support are better able to develop strategies that will help them be more successful at home, in school and in the workplace. Individuals who are not appropriately evaluated and supported are at greater risk of dropping out of school, having employment problems, or being incarcerated. Early diagnosis and appropriately treated FASD enhances and supports individuals, families and society.

If you know a child or a family who may be struggling with the effects of prenatal alcohol exposure, what can you do?

Encourage them to talk to their health care provider about their concern so that the individual can get appropriate evaluations. They may also contact the Fairbanks FAS Diagnostic Team through Alaska Center for Children and Adults (ACCA) at 456-4003 for information regarding evaluations and the resources available to children and families.

On September 9th, FASD Awareness Day, please share this information with your family, coworkers, and others who can help prevent Fetal Alcohol Related Birth Defects and who might provide information and support to individuals and families who are struggling with the results of prenatal alcohol exposure.

### **FIND OUT MORE ABOUT FASD**

The Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program will have an Awareness Table at Tanana Chiefs Conference on Monday, September 9th on the 1st floor Lobby at the Chief Peter John Tribal Building. Please stop by to learn more about FASD and share some fun ideas on non-alcoholic drinks and information to help families be aware of how to prevent FASD and also what services are available for persons with FASD.

For more information about services available in Fairbanks and statewide through Behavioral Health Programs and the FASD Diagnostic Team at ACCA in Fairbanks please contact the Alaska Center for Children and Adults (ACCA) at 456-4003 or check out the statewide information at this link <http://dhss.alaska.gov/osmap/Pages/fasd-team.aspx>



# A Look Back at the 2019 Fire Season

By Tim Mowry, Information Officer, State Fire Operations

With only six of 20 crew members returning, James Ludecker, crew superintendent for the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Wildland Fire Crew, wasn't sure what to expect for the 2019 fire season.

"We only had six returnees crew members return from last season so this was pretty much a brand-new crew," Ludecker said.

But after two months of working on different wildfires around the state, Ludecker couldn't have been happier with how the crew turned out.

"I'm 100 percent pleased," he said during a few precious days off in early August.

The TCC Crew, now in its 10th season as a Type 2 initial attack squad sponsored by the Alaska Division of Forestry, had just returned from a 16-day stint working on the Chalkyitsik Complex, a group of four large fires burning around the village of Chalkyitsik in the Yukon Flats. It was the crew's fourth fire assignment of the summer and the crew responded well to the mental and physical challenges of wildland firefighting.

"The new guys deserve a lot of credit," said Ludecker, who has been the TCC Crew superintendent for the last eight years. "(The fire season) is not just a physical burn, but it's a mental burn, too."

"I tell them, 'You gotta break down that mental burn,'" he said. "We try to teach them techniques on how to overcome that."

The crew responded admirably to all the challenges it has faced so far this season and learned something different from each fire, Ludecker said. There was plenty of work to go around this season, as it was the busiest fire season in Alaska since 2015. As of Aug. 13, a total of 625 fires had burned 2,463,457 acres. It marked the 15th time in 80 seasons that the number of acres burned in Alaska surpassed the 2-million-acre mark.

The TCC crew started its season on the Oregon Lakes Fire southwest of Delta Junction on May 26. The 34,741-acre fire presented a unique

challenge in that it was burning on a military training range and firefighters could not directly engage the fire due to concerns about unexploded ordnance in the fire area. They learned how to be patient and focus on the objectives at hand.

"It was tough," Ludecker said. "There was no fire to fight so we were just doing point protection."

After 13 days on the Oregon Lakes Fire, the TCC crew moved to the Caribou Creek Fire east of Fairbanks on June 17. The fire was only about 7 ½ miles north of Chena Hot Springs Road but there was no road access and everything had to be flown in by helicopter. The crew spent 17 days on the Caribou Creek Fire, staying in spike camps the entire time. The fire was located on a steep hillside and the crew was camped out in a valley at the bottom of the hill, which meant they had to hike up a 1,000-foot vertical climb each day.

"That was another challenge for the crew, going uphill every morning," Ludecker said of the steep climb that greeted the crew each day. "I told them, 'This is just like going down (to the Lower 48), having to hike up 1,000 feet to get to the fire.'"

To make things a little easier, the crew cut a walking path through the forest so they didn't have to climb over downed trees and fight their way through brush.

"I kind of convinced them that it was a good way to start the day," Ludecker said. "I said, 'Just think, we're breaking a sweat right off the bat; it's just like PT (physical training). We're getting our blood pumping first thing in the morning and the endorphins will kick in.'"

The crew was responsible for manning three pumps set up around the fire perimeter and spent considerable time chainsawing their way through jack-strawed trees that had fallen over to build a containment line around the fire.

From the Caribou Creek Fire, the TCC crew moved to the 18,000-acre Boundary River Fire southeast of Tok.

The crew is based in Tok during the season so it was a homecoming of sorts, even though they were camped out at the fire.

"The biggest obstacle on that one was learning how to walk in 3-foot high tussocks," Ludecker said. "Most of the guys had never done that before."

The crew responded well and by the end of their 13-day assignment were practically dancing through the tussocks, he said.

"I told them, 'You guys are elevating your game on each fire you go to,'" Ludecker said.

From the Boundary River Fire, the crew headed to their final assignment of the Alaska season – the Chalkyitsik Complex. On that fire, the crew was broken into smaller squads to do point protection on cabins and Native allotments. Working in smaller, hand-picked groups helped build camaraderie and brought the crew closer together, Ludecker said. The crew spent 16 days on the Chalkyitsik Complex.

All in all, the Alaska fire season posed multiple challenges for the crew and they responded well, Ludecker said.

"It was a pleasure to tackle these obstacles with the personnel we had," he said. "We kept moving on and everyone was in high spirits."

Ludecker praised his assistant crew superintendent, Gilbert Frank, for his help mentoring the crew.

"Gilbert teaches them how to break through certain walls of that mental strain," Ludecker said.

After a busy season in Alaska that earned them upwards of 600 hours of overtime, the crew isn't ready to hang up their pulaskis, Ludecker said. They are hoping fire activity picks up in the Lower 48 so they can travel south to work on fires in the western United States, which has been the case for the last several years. The busy season in Alaska has prepared the crew well for extended work in the Lower 48, if the need arises.

"We're definitely hoping to go to the Lower 48," Ludecker said.

## 2019 Crew Members

- James Ludecker, crew superintendent, Circle, AK
- Gilbert Frank, asst. crew superintendent, Minto AK
- Warren Fredson, squad boss, Venetie, AK
- Levi Tucker, sawyer, Tok, AK
- Daniel Thomas, lead EMT, Northway, AK
- Tony Sam, crew member, Huslia, AK

- Kaleb Paris, sawyer, San Diego, CA
- Eric Odden, crew member, Nome, AK
- Keith Zobel, sawyer, Allakaket, AK
- Haig Hu'ia Williams, lead, Honolulu, HI
- Santiago, Ganoa, squad boss, Fairbanks, AK
- Larry Mark, Jr., sawyer, Tetlin, AK
- Antonio Sisto, Jr., crew member, Arctic Village, AK

- Timothy Troxel, sawyer, Rapid City, S.D.
- Greg Anderson, sawyer, Compton, CA
- Anthony Peter, sawyer, Fort Yukon, AK
- Stanley Rogers, crew member, Fairbanks, AK
- Gabriel Simple, sawyer, Venetie, AK
- Colton Weltzheimer, crew member, Wasilla, AK
- Brian Cogley, crew member, Fairbanks, AK



# What is Happening with the Chum Salmon?

By Rachel Saylor, Communications Manager, TCC

"Everywhere – dead salmon all over the place out here," said Ricko DeWilde in a video that was posted to his Facebook page on July 20th. The video, which spread quickly on social media, showed dozens of dead Chum Salmon lining the banks of the Koyukuk River in Huslia.

"To me it looks like they are dying early," DeWilde says in the video as he documents the fish along the bank of the river, "They don't look rotted out, they look like they still have eggs in them."

The video sparked concerns among those who live along the river system and depend on its livelihood. Salmon represent the lifeline of rural Alaska – feeding thousands of families across the state.

So what was happening along the Koyukuk River that could cause this? Stephanie Quinn-Davidson, Director of the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, was determined to find out.

## Cause of Death

After DeWilde's video was posted, reports began pouring in, "We started to get more reports through social media and people e-mailing and calling," says Quinn-Davidson, "It was mostly people reporting from the Koyukuk River and below."

The public wanted to know why the salmon were dying off. However, it is difficult to determine the cause of death simply by watching a cell phone video.

Quinn-Davidson established a team of people, including the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Yukon Fishery Manager Holly Carrol and UAF Fishery Professor Peter Westley, to travel to the Koyukuk River to find out what was happening.

Upon inspection, the group estimates there to be thousands of dead chum

salmon – and that's on the Koyukuk River alone. "When we were out there we counted 850, but we know we missed a lot them," says Quinn-Davidson, "It also doesn't account for the fish that have already been washed downriver or sank to the bottom."

"The fish didn't show any indication of disease," explains Quinn-Davidson, "There were no lesions, tumors, cuts, fungus, worms, or parasites. We cut the fish open and their organs were perfectly healthy."

So if there are no obvious signs of disease- what could it be?

This year Alaska experienced a warmer than average summer. In fact, the beginning of July proved to be particularly warm. In Huslia, temperatures reached up to 90 degrees for five days in a row (July 7th-11th). At night, the temperatures only went down to 70 degrees, which means the water was not given much of an opportunity to cool down. July 12th is when locals began to see dead salmon floating down the river.

"I am fairly confident it is heat stress," says Quinn-Davidson, "The chum salmon run came into the river about a week late. When they are coming into the river, they aren't eating anymore. So they are only using the fat storage that they have on their body to fuel them."

Quinn-Davidson theorizes that when the salmon ran into the warm river water, they began to burn their fat storage faster than they normally would and were unable to replenish it.

"When you encounter warm water, it's very stressful on the fish," she explains, "It's like running outside when it's 90 degrees out."

This theory would explain why the salmon showed no signs of infection or disease. It would also explain why there were no other species effected.

"King salmon already have quite a bit



Photo by Stephanie Quinn-Davidson

more fat than chum salmon," points out Quinn-Davidson, "So it makes sense that they would be better prepared for warmer waters. They also didn't come into the river late, they came on time."

Additionally, there hasn't been any evidence of Chum Salmon dying off on the Chena or Salcha rivers. This, Quinn-Davidson explains, is due to the fact that they didn't start entering the river until after the heat wave hit.

## Effect on Future Runs

The large concern with large die off of Chum Salmon is obvious – will this affect future runs?

According to Quinn-Davidson, the answer might not be so simple. "It's hard to predict," She explains, "With Chum Salmon it is especially difficult to predict how their population will respond."

This inconsistency is evident when looking at previous years of Chum Salmon runs. There have been years where low runs produced really large numbers in subsequent years, and times where large runs produced low numbers.

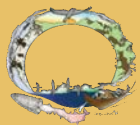
Optimistically, Quinn-Davidson explains that Chum Salmon are resilient, "They bounce back quickly. We know that they are resilient and that is the hope to hang on to," she says, "There were salmon that made it to the spawning grounds who survived the heat. So hopefully they now have genes that are better suited to warmer waters in the future."

For now, we don't know how future runs will be effected – only time will tell.



Photo by Stephanie Quinn-Davidson





Tanana  
Chiefs  
Conference

## THE COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

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Letters to the Editor, other written contributions and photo submissions are welcome. However, space is limited and program-oriented news has priority. We reserve the right to edit or reject material. Letters and opinions are not necessarily the opinions of Tanana Chiefs Conference.

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## JOIN THE TCC FAMILY

[WWW.TANACHIEFS.ORG](http://WWW.TANACHIEFS.ORG)

### Village Vacancies

- Community Health Aide (Koyukuk)
- Community Health Aide/Practitioner (Alatna, Tetlin, Kaltag, Allakaket, Healy Lake, Stevens Village, Dot Lake, Chalkyitsik, Hughes, Circle, Ruby.)
- Elder Nutrition Cook (Venetie, Hughes, Nikolai, McGrath, )
- Substitute Elder Nutrition Cook (Venetie, Circle, Artic Village)
- Family Visitor (Kaltag, Shageluk, Tetlin, Allakaket, Huslia, Hughes, Tanacross, Grayling)
- Preschool Lead Teacher (Nenana)
- Home Care Provider (Rampart, McGrath, Tetlin, Northway)
- Cook(EHS) (Galena)
- Preschool Assistant Teacher (Nenana, Huslia)
- SOC Youth Lead (Kaltag)
- Behavioral Health Aide (Anaktuvuk Pass, Northway)
- RN Case Manager (Nenana)
- Physician Assistant-Upper Tanana Health Center (Tok)
- Edgar Nollner Health Center Director (Galena)

### Fairbanks Vacancies

- OJT Elder Nutrition & Education Support Staff
- Sobering Center Technician
- Brownfield Technician
- Purchasing Agent
- Central Scheduler
- Certified Medical Assistant
- Behavioral Health Clinical Associate-Fairbanks
- Director Employee Recruitment and Retention
- Camp Counselor
- Urgent Care RN
- Youth Chaperone
- SOC Youth Lead
- Wellness Project Coordinator
- Service Coordinator
- Communications Intern
- Hospitality Support Staff
- Operations and Maintenance Engineer
- Outpatient Behavioral Health Case Manager
- Addictions Behavioral Health Clinician
- Housing First Behavioral Health Clinician

### Region- Wide Vacancies

- Healthy Transitions Project Manager

JOB LISTED WERE OPEN AS OF August 21, 2019

## UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

Koyukuk Culture & Wellness Camp  
September 1-7, 2019

Rampart Culture & Wellness Camp  
September 11-16, 2019

Takotna Culture & Wellness Camp  
September 22 - October 5, 2019 - *Tentative*

AFN Annual Convention  
October 14-19, 2019 • Fairbanks

Fairbanks welcomes the  
Alaska Federation of Natives Convention and the  
First Alaskans Institute Elders & Youth Conference  
to the Golden Heart of Alaska! - October 14-19, 2019

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