

Nupuat



A quarterly publication of Chugachmiut, the tribal not-for-profit organization serving the Alaska Native peoples of the Chugach Region.

Winter 2024 Edition



Quyanaa to everyone who attended the Chenega Health Fair in October!

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Explore Career and Itinerant Opportunities

Chugachmiut is a rapidly growing 501(c)(3) non-profit agency the Tribal consortium created to promote self-determination to the seven Native communities of the Chugach Region. We are seeking highly motivated, talented candidates to join us on our journey to excellence. At Chugachmiut, you not only start a job but a career that truly makes a difference in the lives of others. We offer robust benefits to full-time employees. Join our team!

Anchorage

Grants Administrator
Human Resources Director
Project Accountant
Recruiter
Senior Staff Accountant
Social Services Coordinator
Staff Accountant
Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Coordinator

Chenega

Community Health Aide (CHA) Trainee
Health Administrative Assistant (HAA)
HAA Itinerant

Nanwalek

Head Start Teacher Substitute Aide/Cook/Janitor
HAA Itinerant
Starlink Satellite Dish Technician
Vehicle Service Specialist
Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO)

Port Graham

CHA Trainee
CHA-I to IV, CHA Trainee, or CHP
HAA Itinerant
Vehicle Service Specialist
VPSO

Seward

Behavioral Health Clinician
Building Custodian
Certified Medical Assistant/
Medical Assistant
Dental Assistant
Dental Hygienist
Dental Hygienist Itinerant
Dental Practice Manager
Dentist
Facilities Manager
HAA
Inventory Support Specialist
Medical Director
Pharmacist In-Charge/
Pharmacy Manager
Tribal Home Visiting Family Visitor

Tatitlek

CHA Trainee
Vehicle Service Specialist
VPSO

Any Regional Community

Advanced Practice Provider
Itinerant
CHA III, IV or Practitioner Itinerant
Dentist Itinerant
Domestic Violence Tribal Advocate

Flexible Location(s)

Electronic Health Record Trainer (Anchorage or Seward)
Head Start Health and Wellness Coordinator (Anchorage, Kenai, or Homer)
Tribal Home Visiting Family Visitor (3 positions: 1- Cordova, 1-Seward, and 1-Valdez)

Chugachmiut has a hiring preference for qualified Alaska Native and American Indian applicants under P.L. 93-638 Indian Self-Determination Act.

Questions? Contact employment@chugachmiut.org, (907) 562-4155, or (800) 478-4155 (toll-free).



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Nunaka: My Village Wins Anthem Award!

We're thrilled to announce that **Nunaka: My Village** – *Where Language Comes to Play* has won Silver in the “Education, Art & Culture—Education or Literacy Platform” category at the 4th Annual Anthem Awards! We couldn't be prouder of this achievement and are deeply grateful to everyone who helped make it possible. This significant win celebrates and uplifts the Sugpiaq language and culture! It serves as an early childhood introduction to cultural heritage while supporting essential school readiness goals for Chugachmiut's federally funded Head Start program.

Check out the announcement and team credits, including contributions from Chugachmiut, FableVision, and culture and language bearers from across the region: www.anthemawards.com/winners/list/entry/#!education-art-culture/education-or-literacy-platform/nunaka-my-village/0/nunaka/527460.



Scan the QR code to view the link.



2024 Christmas Card Design Contest

Cama'! Quyanaa and Awa'ahdah to all the talented artists who dedicated their time and creativity to this year's 2024 Christmas Card Design Contest! We are thrilled to announce the winners of this year's competition. Artists tied in with the 50th anniversary theme: “Self-Determination at its Best: 50 Years of Service to the Chugach Region; Building the Next Generation.” Thank you for sharing your talent and creativity with us!

Valentina Eluska from Nanwalek was the Grand Prize Winner! She received a \$200 cash prize, and her beautiful design was featured on our official 2024 Christmas card. The Runners-up were **Carmella Tanape** from Nanwalek and **Melonie Kashevarof** from Chenega! In recognition of their outstanding entries, both received a \$50 cash prize.



FCC Licenses for Port Graham and Nanwalek

Congratulations to the Native Village of Port Graham and the Native Village of Nanwalek! Port Graham Village Council and Nanwalek IRA Council now own FCC 2.5 GHz Wireless Spectrum licenses. These licenses will enable the Tribes to create wireless networks that deliver faster, more reliable internet access to their communities. Building village-wide wireless networks will help close the connectivity gap in rural areas. Stay tuned for more updates.

Port Graham Village Council and Nanwalek IRA Council gain FCC 2.5 GHz Wireless Spectrum licenses!



Empowering our communities with enhanced connectivity!

Please send any questions to Jason Williams at jasonw@chugachmiut.org.

Williams Appointed to FCC Native Nations Communications Task Force

Chugachmiut is pleased to announce that **Jason Williams**, Director of Information Technology and Corporate Security, has been appointed to a three-year term on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Native Nations Communications Task Force. This Task Force is dedicated to fulfilling the FCC's commitment to increasing access to broadband and other communications infrastructure deployment and services on tribal lands.

Jason brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities facing tribal nations across Alaska from his work to bring high-speed satellite internet service to the Native Village of Nanwalek and the Native Village of Port Graham. His appointment underscores our ongoing efforts to ensure all tribal communities have the connectivity they need to thrive in the digital age.

We congratulate Jason on this significant appointment as he embarks on this crucial mission to enhance broadband access and communications services for tribal lands.

Please send any comments or suggestions regarding broadband in your community to Jason Williams at jasonw@chugachmiut.org.



Jason Williams in Nanwalek. Courtesy photo.

Mark Hiratsuka Receives ILI Award

In October, **Mark Hiratsuka**, Culture & Heritage Director for Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation, received an Indigenous Language Institute (ILI) award on the Culture Night of the 12th Annual ILI Language Symposium. The ILI presents these awards to recognize individuals, communities, or organizations that have made significant contributions to revitalizing, preserving, and promoting Indigenous languages. Honorees demonstrate innovation, dedication, and success in strengthening Native languages through teaching, resource development, community programs, or other impactful initiatives. The ceremony celebrates efforts to ensure Indigenous languages thrive for future generations.



Mark Hiratsuka. Courtesy photo.

Inée Slaughter of ILI said, “An anonymous donor contributed \$500 to be awarded to two Elder Language Practitioners – woman and man – in recognition of their dedicated lifework to revitalize their Native Languages.” ILI selected Mark Hiratsuka and Vicki Downey from the Pueblo of Tesuque Language Program in Tesuque, New Mexico.

Fire Crew Aids Capitol Tree & Head Start Centers



Forester Edward Morgan shared photos of the Capitol Christmas Tree in Washington, DC.

This year, the Capitol Christmas Tree in Washington, DC, came from Wrangell, Alaska, and the Tongass National Forest. As part of the celebrations, Chugachmiut’s wildland fire and fuels crews assisted by cutting tree cookies—small, circular slices of wood—that were used to create ornaments traveling with the tree to the West Front Lawn. Our crews cut hundreds of tree cookies to accompany the tree, which departed Wrangell on Oct. 26. The tree made numerous stops across the country before arriving in time for the tree-lighting celebration on Dec. 3, 2024.

Additionally, some tree cookies were delivered to our Head Start centers in Nanwalek and Port Graham. There, children used them to create holiday ornaments and other projects, separate from those sent with the Capitol Christmas Tree.

Community Member Spotlight – Nicole Norman

Nicole Rae Norman, a proud resident of Paluwik (Native Village of Port Graham), has gained national attention for being featured on the Today show in the article “Muktuk Mukbang: How Indigenous TikTokers Are Sharing Their Traditional Foods with the World.” A dedicated community member and cultural advocate, she uses this platform to preserve and share the rich traditions of her Sugpiaq heritage.

Born and raised in Paluwik, Nicole has deep connections to her community and cultural practices. Currently serving as a secretary for the Port Graham School, she also plays a vital role as a supervisor for the Summer Youth Program. In the Summer Youth Program, she teaches local youth traditional subsistence and cooking skills, guiding them in preparing Native foods later gifted to the village elders. She says, “To me, the most rewarding feeling is passing on knowledge to our youth and seeing them share it as a gift to the Elders,” she explains. “That’s what it’s all about.”



Nicole Rae Norman. Courtesy photo.

Nicole’s life story reflects her incredible resilience and adaptability. After attending Port Graham School, she completed her high school education at Soldotna High School, where she experienced a significant cultural shift, transitioning from a small village school of 40 students to a larger school with over 600 students. She graduated high school in 2001 and pursued training in computer repair at Job Corps in Palmer, Alaska. Over the years, she worked in various roles, including an internship in accounts payable, before returning to her roots in Paluwik in 2019.

In 2021, Nicole ventured into the world of TikTok, inspired by a local youth’s gift of seal meat and blubber. Documenting her first solo attempt at making fermented seal oil, she shared a video to TikTok that quickly went viral, amassing over 5.1 million views. This success motivated her to create a platform centered on subsistence, culture, and traditional ways of life in Paluwik. Her content, which includes gathering and preparing traditional foods like bidarkis, salmon, and halibut, aims to educate and inspire others. “I love being able to educate about our unique lifestyle,” she says.



Nicole processing salmon. Courtesy photo.

Community Member Spotlight, continued

Bidarkis, also known as chiton or gumboots, has become a hallmark of her platform, captivating viewers with their unique structure and taste. Through her detailed tutorials, Nicole ensures that even a novice cook unfamiliar with these traditional foods can learn to process and prepare them confidently. Her videos also showcase the intricacies of subsisting on salmon and halibut, from filleting to brining and smoking, emphasizing the care and dedication required to preserve these foods correctly. “It’s so much work, but it’s absolutely worth it when you’re sitting around a table in the middle of winter enjoying your Native foods with family and friends,” Nicole reflects.



Nicole processing bidarkis. Courtesy photo.

While Nicole’s journey has garnered widespread support, she has also faced criticism from those who misunderstand her culture. However, she remains focused on her mission: “As long as I leave someone with knowledge of our culture, I am good with that,” she affirms.

Nicole’s feature on Today.com and other Indigenous creators reinforces her efforts to educate and inspire youth in Paluwik while fostering an understanding of Alaska Native traditions. “It’s an experience I will never forget,” she says, expressing pride in her accomplishments and determination to continue advocating for the celebration of Sugpiaq culture and foods.

With her growing platform, Nicole hopes to keep learning, sharing, and empowering the next generation to embrace and celebrate their heritage. “That is my dream,” she concludes.

Through her storytelling and subsistence-focused content, she shines a spotlight on Paluwik and the Chugach region, continuing to inspire others to connect with and celebrate Sugpiaq traditions. Congratulations, Nicole! Find Nicole on TikTok at @colierae83.

Nupuat Newsletter - Call for Submissions

We invite you to submit content for the next Nupuat Newsletter edition. Have an update from your community? Have some suggested topics or feedback for our newsletter? Have a story, essay, or poetry to share? We welcome submissions from tribal members, councils, and employees.

The deadline for submission is Friday, Feb. 28, 2025. To submit an update or subscribe, please contact us at media@chugachmiut.org or (907) 562-4155.



Health Services Division News

This quarter, we focused on recruitment efforts to fill position vacancies and ensure consistent service coverage and delivery throughout the region. We welcomed several new team members: **Joshua Giauque**, Dentist Itinerant (Seward); **Stacy Hetrick**, Health Administrative Assistant (Port Graham); **Erika Noll**, Health Coach (Seward/Region); **Jeanette Nienaber**, Advanced Practice Provider (Seward/Region); **Judy Kepes**, RN Case Manager (Seward/Region); **Charlemagne McMullen**, CHA/P Itinerant (Port Graham); **Jon Phillip**, CHP Itinerant (Region); and **Rene Pitka**, CHA-IV Itinerant (Region).

Highlights

- Community Health Aides expand training and certification
- Held Health Fairs in Nanwalek and Chenega
- New AFCHAN carts for telemedicine are now in use
- 1st Whooping Cough (Pertussis) case confirmed at clinic
- Expanded point-of-care lipid testing to provide screening for the pediatric population
- New spirometry equipment for pulmonary function testing was purchased and distributed
- New vital sign wall units purchased and distributed to all village clinics
- Key vaccination reminders
 - 2024/2025 Influenza Vaccine
 - 2024/2025 COVID-19 Vaccine
 - DTap or Tdap Vaccines (for Whooping Cough/Pertussis)
 - Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine

Chugachmiut Regional Health Center Progress

Construction is progressing in Seward, with an expected opening date in March 2025. We look forward to welcoming you to the new Chugachmiut Regional Health Center next year! Stay tuned for further updates.

Teresa Swartz, MA, **Bridget Felton**, RN, **Eric Gardner**, MA, and **Judy Kepes**, RN Case Manager, recently visited the site to check the progress.



Health Education

Moving forward, we will link clinical quality measures with the health observance recognition months to provide training, education, and resources for staff and community members to increase health education and awareness throughout the region. Clinical quality measures are standard benchmarks used by us and most of the Alaska Tribal Health System to track and improve the prevention and management of chronic conditions, like diabetes, in the communities we serve.

Monthly Awareness Focus

January: Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

February: American Heart Month

March: National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Health Services Division News

January: Cervical Cancer Awareness Month

Our clinical quality measure focus in January is screening for cervical cancer. This measure tracks the percentage of women ages 21–64 who have been screened for cervical cancer and the percentage of women ages 30–64 who have had cervical human papillomavirus (HPV) testing within the past five years.



How are we doing? We're meeting two out of three measures! We've achieved our targets by screening 59.59% for cervical cancer and 59.76% for HPV. However, there's room for improvement to ensure more women stay current with screenings every three years.

Why is screening so important? Regular Pap tests can help prevent cervical cancer by detecting cervical cell changes that could develop into cancer if left untreated. A Pap test can also detect cervical cancer early, often before symptoms appear or the cancer spreads, making it easier to treat successfully.

February: American Heart Month

Our clinical quality measure focus in February is controlling high blood pressure and prescribing statin therapy to prevent and treat cardiovascular disease. For the **controlling blood pressure** measure, we track the percentage of patients ages 18–85 diagnosed with hypertension whose blood pressure (BP) was adequately controlled (below 140/90 mmHg) during the measurement period. Our goal is to reach a 63% target ratio. For **statin therapy**, we track patients at high risk for cardiovascular events who were prescribed or actively taking statin therapy during the measurement period. Our goal is to reach a 75% target ratio.



How are we doing? Currently, we are not meeting our target goals for either measure at 57.92% for controlling BP and 54.74% for statin therapy. There is room for improvement in this area.

Why is controlling blood pressure important? The high force of blood flow can damage your blood vessels, making them weak, stiff, or narrower. Over time, hypertension can harm several important organs, including your heart, kidneys, brain, and eyes. Adopting a healthy lifestyle can help maintain your blood pressure within a healthy range. Preventing or treating hypertension can significantly lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.

March: National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Our clinical quality measure focus in March is colorectal cancer (CRC) screenings. For CRC screenings, we track the percentage of adults ages 50–75 who received appropriate screening for colorectal cancer. For CRC screenings in Alaska, we measure the percentage of adults ages 40–75 who were appropriately screened for colorectal cancer. We're meeting our target goals. Currently, 62.32% and 56.44% are getting screened for colorectal cancer.



Why is colorectal cancer screening important? Colorectal cancer screening is especially critical for Alaska Natives, who have significantly higher rates of colorectal cancer compared to the general population. This is why we recommend starting screenings at age 40 rather than age 50. If you have a family history of colon cancer, screenings should begin at age 40 or 10 years before the age at which your family member was diagnosed. *Early detection is vital—screening tests can identify precancerous polyps, allowing them to be removed before they develop into cancer.*

Graphics on this page courtesy of Adobe Express

Health Services Division News

Community Health Aide Updates

- **Kelly Yeaton**, CHA-III, from Nanwalek, attended blended Session IV training at the ANTHC training center and will, once completed, work on her post-session learning needs prior to obtaining certification as a CHA-IV.
- **Tania Romanoff**, CHA-II, from Nanwalek, attended Session III training at the ANTHC training center. Once she completes her post-session learning needs, she will be certified as a CHA-III.
- **Nicholi Ukatish-Gahimer**, CHA-I, from Nanwalek, completed blended Session I training at ANTHC. He returned to the village and got all his post-session learning needs and patient visits. He is now certified as a CHA-I. He will be attending Session II in the first quarter of 2025.
- **Charlemagne McMullen**, from Port Graham, traveled to Seward for two weeks to recertify as a CHA/IV Itinerant provider. Once she is recertified, she will provide itinerant coverage, primarily in Port Graham.
- **Melonie Kashevarof**, CHA-IV from Chenega attended this year's CHAP Forum and shared her experience.

CHAP Forum Reflections by Melonie Kashevarof

I always enjoy CHAP Forum. This year, I felt that all the speakers and topics directly applied to my community and our region. It was especially great that all the speakers truly understood the roles of community health aides, as well as dental and behavioral health aides—something that's not always the case. Many ANMC ER providers are unfamiliar with what community health aides do, even though it's essential for them to know.

I find CHAP Forum refreshing, energizing, and a breath of fresh air. My first forum was in 2022, right after the pandemic, and it felt like the first one in a long time. It seemed a bit hesitant then, but not this year—this year felt smooth and well-thought-out. Taking time away from the daily grind of working as a community health aide gave me a new perspective. It's like looking at my work through a fresh lens, which makes me feel differently about how I approach things in the clinic.

Networking with other CHAs, stepping outside the village, seeing peers learn and win awards, being off-call, and having doctors available for a whole hour in person to freely ask questions—it's something we don't get anywhere else. Specialty providers and new doctors showed a lot of interest in Alaska's community health aide program, which is so important given that we are often the only healthcare providers for miles and miles. Many doctors even gave out their personal cell phone numbers, just in case CHAs ever need their expert advice.

When I attended my first CHAP Forum as a naive CHA-II, some of the topics seemed extreme to me at the time. I remember thinking, "Why are they bringing this up? That would never happen in my little village." I couldn't have been more wrong! Since then, I've encountered all those situations, and I've had to do some quick thinking. I'm so grateful I was able to attend CHAP Forum in person.

The same goes for this year. All 23 topics—yes, 23!—have already found their way to me at the Chenega Clinic in one way or another. I'm incredibly thankful that my tribal health organization sent me to CHAP Forum so I can keep learning and preparing for whatever might walk through my clinic doors next.



Melonie with her children at the Chenega Health Fair in October.

Health Services Division News

Dental Services

Our primary focus is recruitment to ensure we can meet the needs of our communities and increase access to dental services. We are actively recruiting for a full-time dental practice manager, dentist, dental hygienist, dental assistant, and itinerant providers. The team attended the first Dentrix (dental EHR) kick-off meeting. The planned conversion date is April 1, 2025.

As of today, the dental schedule includes plans to increase village dental service visits and expand dental hygiene services in Seward as we fill the positions currently posted for recruitment.

Chenega	Nanwalek	Port Graham	Seward	Tatitlek
DENTAL SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feb. 24-28 	DENTAL SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oct. 14-18 Dec. 2-6 Jun. 2-6 	DENTAL SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dec. 9-13 Mar. 17-20 Apr. 7-11 May 12-16 Jun. 2-6 Jun. 9-13 	DENTAL SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oct. 21-25 Dec. 16-20 Jan. 27-31 Feb. 10-14 Mar. 17-20 Apr. 14-18 	DENTAL SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 19-23
HYGIENE SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mar. 17-21 Sept. 8-12 	HYGIENE SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nov. 12-18 Jan. 20-26 Apr. 28-May 2 Aug. 4-10 Sept. 20-26 	HYGIENE SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jan. 27-31 May 5-9 Aug. 11-15 		HYGIENE SERVICES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nov. 8-11 Mar. 24-28 Sept. 15-19

DENTAL SERVICES: Dr. Wood, Southcentral Foundation (SCF), Dr. Giauque, Dr. Owens, Dr. Zimin

HYGIENE SERVICES: Angela McKinney

Vaccine Updates

Routine vaccines can prevent serious diseases and some types of cancer. We encourage you to speak with your healthcare provider to learn more about the necessary immunizations or visit vaccinate.alaska.gov to check your family's record using Docket.

Annual Health Fair Events

It is important to increase community awareness about healthcare prevention and early disease detection. We hosted Nanwalek's Health Event in September and Chenega's Health Event in October.



Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

We are pleased to share that we have hired an EMS trainer who will start in January to support our region with training and emergency response. CPR/ETT training will be scheduled in Port Graham and Tatitlek soon. To support your community during emergencies, contact your local clinic to be added to the training list.

Health Services Division News

Healthy Holiday Eating Tips

By **Joe Nyholm**, Registered Dietitian with the Chugachmiut Diabetes Program

Happy Holidays from the Chugachmiut Diabetes Program! Reflecting on 2024, it's been an eventful year, and we're excited to share some updates in this newsletter. This year, we implemented the IHS Joslin Vision Program and deployed their retinal camera in our region to screen for diabetic retinopathy. Throughout the year, we hosted our annual health fairs and launched a pilot program in partnership with the Homer Farmers Market, bringing fresh produce to our Port Graham Health Fair. We hope to expand this initiative in 2025.

Looking ahead to 2025, we're excited to bring back our regional step challenges! But before we jump into the new year, we'd like to share some healthy eating and exercise tips to help you stay on track during the holiday season—a time to enjoy special meals and connections with family, friends, or your community.

Healthy Eating Tips

1. **Start Your Day Right:** Eat breakfast or a healthy snack earlier. Don't skip meals to "save room" for a feast—it can make managing your blood sugar harder and increase the likelihood of overeating.
2. **Watch the Pre-Meal Snacks:** At gatherings, limit chips, crackers, and similar snacks. Serve a small portion on a plate or napkin, and stick to that amount. If salsa is offered, choose it over creamy dips or cheese.
3. **Moderate Starches:** Choose fewer starchy foods (like potatoes, macaroni, and bread). Enjoy a serving of your favorite or sample smaller portions, such as half a slice of bread and a few spoons of other starches.
4. **Pick Healthy Vegetables:** Choose raw, grilled, or steamed vegetables. Avoid those with cream sauce, gravy, butter, or cheese sauce.
5. **Choose Calorie-Free Drinks:** Drink water, unsweetened tea, seltzer, or diet sodas. Avoid sugary drinks like regular soda and juice.
6. **Be Mindful of Alcohol:** If you drink alcohol, limit your intake. Women should have no more than one alcoholic drink per day, and men should have no more than two.
7. **Keep Desserts Small:** If you have dessert, go for a small piece. Consider sharing or asking for half a slice of cake or pie and skip the frosting or whipped cream.
8. **Take a Walk After Meals:** Walking helps lower blood sugar levels and gives you more energy. Invite others to join you for a post-meal stroll.
9. **Don't Dwell on Overeating:** If you overeat, don't feel bad—it's just one meal. Reflect on the days when you made healthier choices.
10. **Get Back on Track:** Plan a healthy breakfast for the next day, such as a boiled egg and whole wheat toast with non-fat or soy milk. You're back on track!



Chenega residents play the diabetes sugar challenge game with Joe Nyholm, RD, to learn more about sugar ingredients in common beverages. Quyanaa to everyone who attended the Chenega Health Fair!

Small choices build healthy habits—here's to a happy, healthy 2025!

Realty Hosted Trust Manager's Meeting

Chugachmiut Realty hosted the Trust Manager's Meeting in Anchorage in early December. Realty works alongside knowledgeable, caring, and detail-driven folks across the state, including trust managers who assist Native tribes and regions with tasks such as navigating Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) probate processes and other land and resource management needs.



Attendees (not listed in order) included **Paul Roehl** of Alaska Village Council Presidents (AVCP), **Shelby Sinnok** of Kawerak, **Eileen Grant** of Tanana Chiefs Conference, **Tillie Ticket** of Native Village of Selawik, **Pearl Greist** of Maniilaq, **Ella Lisbourne** of Maniilaq, **Abraham Snyder** of Kotzebue IRA, **Annie Golia** of Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA), **Carol Fleusburg** of BBNA, **Tom Hoseth** of BBNA, **Felipe Farley** of BBNA, **Mariano Peters** of BBNA and **Eva Dickson** of Kawerak. Chugachmiut staff included **Jackie Medaris**, **Nathan Lojewski**, **Shane Logue** and **Genevieve Jenkins**. We're grateful to everyone who attended and contributed their expertise, making this meeting a valuable opportunity to collaborate and support Native communities across the state.

For more information about Chugachmiut Realty Department, please contact us at (907) 562-4155.

Scholarship Opportunities and Vocational Support

Chugachmiut offers funding to eligible participants pursuing education at accredited institutions. Scholarship awards are determined by the number of qualified applicants.

To qualify, applicants must:

- Be 17 years or older
- Have a high school diploma or GED
- Be enrolled in one of the Chugach Region's Tribes (Chenega, Seward, Tatitlek, Nanwalek, or Port Graham)

Deadlines

- **Spring 2025:** December 31, 2024
- **Fall 2025:** June 30, 2025

Chugachmiut Higher Education Scholarship



Chugach Regional Writers

Preparation for the Holiday By Nancy “Liita” Yeaton

As the holidays approach, you can hear the adults talk about the paint color they will order from Spenard Builders Supply in Homer.

Everyone is preparing their homes for the holidays to come. Nameday and Thanksgiving start making you think of Christmas, one of the bigger holidays in Nanwalek.

The painting gets the adults excited, thinking of Orthodox Christmas, which is celebrated for two weeks. Preparing for the holiday starts in December, with the painting of inside the house, making your ceiling design, making a cross with garland, or as simple as garland from corner to corner of the ceiling, hanging decorations upon the garland, and preparing the house for the carolers.

The men gather to clean and add new decorations to the traveling twirling star that is taken home to home when carolers come to sing Christmas Orthodox hymns. That star is called “Swistaaq,” an ornate wooden frame star.

The household is filled with excitement, thinking about the food to serve when the carolers and guests come. The sulunaq bucket is placed in the siinaq, dried fruit readily available, ducks to be plucked and singed, tomcods needing to be gutted, and making bread.

My favorite smell associated with the holidays is turkey cooking in the middle of the night, smelling oranges—the fresh citrus smell as you start to peel it and bite into the juicy sections—apples, smelling the freshness compared to the dried apples, and peppermint candy canes that took your breath away as you inhaled.

My mother liked to cook the turkey throughout the night; it really set the stage for the holiday we would be celebrating. Pies were not her thing; it was making the pie crust. The merriment began with the turkey baking early in the morning. As children, the ‘Thanksgiving Parade’ filled us with ‘ooohs and aaaaaahs’ as we were mesmerized by the parade balloons. My favorite was the ‘Jolly Green Giant’—so big, with all those balloons and so many hands holding the ropes to guide them as they floated along. After the parade we would change into our nice clothes and eat until we could not eat anymore.

By the time my two daughters reached the ages of two and four, we had moved to English Bay; life as we had known was going to change like night and day for the holidays. Many holidays celebrated in the village were the Nameday’s. After a baby is born, parents decide which Orthodox Saint is closest to the day you are born, and a Saint Name is selected. Saint Names were a bigger celebration than a birthday.

To honor your Saint Nameday, there is a dinner; the counters are filled with all kinds of selections: soup galore, fish pie, desserts, and plenty of coffee and tea. The first Nameday dinner I attended was unreal; the soup, the sides, the rolls, the desserts, and the food came out of the woodwork. During those early years of my introduction to life in the village, the houses were just little homes; most had two rooms, and the dining room table was the main area for gathering.

Many times, the person hosting the dinner would send one of their children to each of the houses in the village to invite people to come and eat. This was done until all the families had been invited. Once all the adults had eaten, the children came to eat and clean up after themselves.

During those early years, many of the women would make sure to have dried fruit to rehydrate for making pies, and as time went on, pistachio pudding was bought to make pudding pies. Pies were changing; fresh fruit became available for making pies, such as fresh apples, pumpkin pie filling, canned cherry, and blueberry, which were added to the list of pies.

Chugach Regional Writers

Preparation for the Holiday, continued

As Christmas approached, my daughters and I would select cookie recipes. One of our favorites was the candy cane cookies. We would hang these on the Christmas trees. I love the smell of pine trees and cookies baking in the oven. My daughter's happy smiles as we created our cookies, frosting some of them. We would try the batter and the frosting, so much sugar that filled us with memories and the flavor of the holidays.

We made popcorn, smelling it as we strung it with pieces of tin foil and draped it over the tree. Singing Christmas songs, one of our favorites was singing along with 'Frosty the Snowman.' My favorite part was looking at my daughters after all the decorations were hung up; the light in their eyes shone with love in what we all made together.

That is what holidays feel like: children with eyes full of mini fireworks displayed so gleefully. Long gone are those days when my daughters were so little. It is their grandchildren who share those innocent, joyful, merry moments. It is their turn to shine like the North Star as they dance for their presents and the joy in the air.

Christmas Past By Gail Evanoff

I am reminiscent of Christmas past

Many memories, unforgettable, I hold fast

The simple life of togetherness as family gather for food and fun

Decorations made by hand

And bubble lights that float ohh so grand

peak the imagination that fills us with wonder and glee

The tree dressed in strings of popcorn with chains of red and green

And silver tinsel that hang from every branch brings happiness and a sense of peace, the bells that line the ceiling, sway softly, as if reminding us that they are ringing in the birth of baby Jesus adds to the wonder of each candle that twinkle in the dark

I am in awe always of the memory and yearn to witness one more

And before we all are ushered off to bed, we each get to savor the bonbon treats kept secret for just this day

Christmas day is always busy and loud. It's a time for homemade root beer hauled out of the cellar and divinity and treasures under the tree.

Stockings of knitted yarn filled with delights of Jackstones, coloring books, and nuts of every kind make you feel like you're floating in a dream. You feel special and wrapped in love!

The air is filled with the sweet smell of goose baking and loaves of bread cooling on the racks and the sack pudding and the fruit cakes that look like there are jewels on top gives off the sweetest smell of orange and cinnamon makes waiting unbearable as we wait to be called to the table, Mom and Pop sit at each end, joyfully laughing as each plate gets filled and stories and laughter ring through the house!

Christmas is here at last, and joy, pure joy fills the air.

Chugach Regional Writers

Cooking Surprise By Victoria Clark

It was a sunny but cold day, and I was in one of my cooking phases. I was hooked on Chinese food and had been trying all different recipes—easy, hard, weird, just all-around fun. This one took a different turn, one that neither I nor my family expected.

I was going to attempt General Tso's chicken with fried rice. I floured up the chicken, fried it to a golden perfection, and set it aside. Then, I cleaned up and started on the sauce and the rice. The rice I put in the rice cooker was easy. The sauce was more complicated but did not look difficult. I got out my ingredients, all fresh, and I ordered several special bottles of soy sauce and miso a few weeks before. These had arrived just days before. I never knew how many types of soy sauces there were before starting to make Chinese food or the different mushrooms you could find. I mixed the first ingredients in a small bowl per recipe and then cut up the hot peppers.

I turned to the stove, set my pan on the burner, lit it up, got the flame to a low level, added my oil, turned, and retrieved the peppers I had just cut up. My grandkids and their mom were watching television and playing games. I slid the peppers into the oil and stirred, then turned to grab the next ingredient to put in. When I turned back to the stove, smoke was rising. I began to choke, my eyes to water, the peppers were burning, and to my consternation, I had made tear gas. I quickly shut off the burner and turned on the fan, but it did not help, and the noxious fumes had spread.

My daughter and the kids were choking and gagging as they ran to open the doors, all the while laughing at me with tears running down their faces. I don't know how anyone could see. There had only been two small peppers cut up in that pan, but it made the equivalent of one of the pepper sprays they set off in the prison where I once worked. All I could think was, "Oh goodness, when they released the pepper spray, it lasted for days."

We all stood on the deck outside. It was chilly, but the sun was still bright. I took the pan out the door with me and heaved the offensive peppers into the trees on the woodier side of the house. I then waved the pan around, cooling it off before returning inside and depositing it on the stove. The smoke was still seething out through the doors, visibly. I thought of my pan; it was blackened and possibly ruined. Luckily, it was my small pan, and I had others that size. Still, it was going to be a mess to clean up.

After a few minutes, the smoke had cleared, but unfortunately, the "pepper spray effect" had not. So, I piled everyone in the car for a drive as it was cold, and I wanted to leave the doors wide open with all the fans going. It was a pretty evening for a drive, and we all laughed and talked about my disaster. I knew I would never hear the end of this. We drove for about an hour and went home. I cautiously entered the house, and though the burning scent lingered a little, we could tolerate it and go back in.

We still had not eaten, and I was not about to try again. I decided to use the chicken and make sesame chicken instead; there were no noxious ingredients in that one. The rice cooker had finished, and I had made some boiled eggs earlier. I let my grandson chop those up and help with the fried rice. The food tasted exceptionally good, even though it was not what I started out making. I have not attempted to make General Tso's. I may get brave one day and attempt it again, but not yet.

Chugach Regional Writers

Lights, Music, Shine By Sandra L. Kleven

It's Christmas—this season of generosity and love. I have been caught up in the beauty of the night; transfixed by the star of Bethlehem, or even a row of small spruce trees lit in blue against the white of drifting snow.

I have paid my dues and done decades of due diligence toward making Christmas bright — crocheting gifts during lean years, mixing my found recipe for golden fruitcake, driving with children through the bright neighborhoods during a dark December evening. One time, I went to a rest home with my children to sing the carols for infirm elders. Rest home, that's what we called them. More likely now, assisted-living centers, less poetic.

I remember the struggle to fold candied fruit and nuts into a heavy batter moistened with orange juice. Now, it reminds me of clay—solid yet pliable.

I've done my share of shopping and late-night gift wrapping, feeling the urgency to get everything done while the kids are asleep. For years, I worked to write and address Christmas cards, sending out 30 or more most years. Expensive.

As a teenager, I tried to forget no one in my huge family of origin—sisters, brothers, aunts, cousins. Eventually, I gave up gifting my grown-up siblings, and they, too, busied themselves with families of their own.

At the center of my childhood Christmas, there was something else—a sort of meditative ritual—that has disappeared. It is the hanging of the tinsel, the final embellishment of the tree.

Tinsel - long, thin, shiny – silvery strands of foil. Mother would drape 20 to 40 strands over her outstretched hand. Doubled like that, they were about 10 inches long. She carefully placed tinsel on every branch and bow. As I got older, I took her place, carefully draping tinsel on the tree. I heard that some people would throw tinsel at the tree. A travesty! Horror! We carefully placed each strand, perhaps a half-inch apart. One bow might require 30 silvery doubled strands.

Once placed, they caught the lights from the tree and shimmered. When the tree was finished, I could sit alone with it, even as an adult, and stare into the sweet evergreen depths. I could get lost in it.

Today, Christmas trees are lovely and interesting with a diversity of ornaments or matching glass balls. They are delightful and different from each other – a lot of creative energy goes into each one.

And yet the effort that went into placing tinsel led to tremendous satisfaction in the final presentation of the tree. Tinsel covered imperfections, making every tree perfect.

I wouldn't go back to it. Even if one could still find the real thing – like tin, almost – not a plastic “saran wrap” imitation, I can't spend the time hanging tinsel that way these days.

Not only that, when it falls to the floor, a pet can eat it, to be discovered later shining in a litter box or worse, hanging from a dog's back end.

I am content with the memory of Mom and me carefully, gently placing the strands, Mom checking over my branches, shaking her head, or nodding, “Good.”

Chugach Regional Writers

Members of Chugach Regional Writers gather weekly to share their writing and receive constructive feedback. Dedicated to the craft of writing, they aspire to publish their work. Meetings are held every week, and newcomers are always welcome. Here is some information about the writers who contributed to this issue.

Nancy Yeaton

A renowned Chugach Region culture bearer, Nancy Yeaton has developed a rich multimedia ethnography that highlights Sugpiak heritage, language, and traditional knowledge. She has also created culturally based curricula for use in classrooms across Alaska. She is a founding member of Chugach Regional Writers and lives in Nanwalek. She practices traditional methods, crafting sewing needles from bone, twine from local plants, and dyes from plants and berries.

Gail Evanoff

Gail Evanoff has been a Behavioral Health Practitioner in her island community of Chenega since 2012. In recognition of her work, she received the Rising Star Award from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium in 2014. Gail has served as a board member for Chugachmiut and the Chenega Tribal Council. She has raised four children and has been married for 55 years to her high school sweetheart. Gail shares, "I write to understand myself and release feelings."

Victoria Clark

Victoria Clark is an Addictions Counselor for Chugachmiut. She was born during a blizzard in Suffolk County, NY, and raised in Bayport, NY. In 1987, she moved to Alaska and now resides on the Kenai Peninsula. Victoria loves the outdoors and frequently takes long drives to observe the abundant wildlife near her remote home. She is also passionate about art, music, and reading. Victoria holds a master's degree in Mental Health Counseling from Walden University and is a licensed professional counselor.

Sandra L. Kleven

Sandra L. Kleven is the Behavioral Health Clinical Supervisor for Chugachmiut and the facilitator of Chugach Regional Writers. This group meets weekly to work on writing and is open to new participants. If you want to share your stories and build connections with other writers, consider joining the group. You can connect with Sandy at (907) 764-1945 or via email at sandrak@chugachmiut.org.

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Behavioral Health Crisis Line

Need support or someone to talk to? The Chugachmiut Behavioral Health Crisis Line is here for you 24/7! Your well-being matters, and we're ready to help. We provide support for Counseling, Addictions, Domestic Violence, Social Services, and more! We're just a call away; there is no wrong door, as it's answered 24/7.

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A seven-member Board of Directors governs Chugachmiut; each board member selected by their tribal government. The Board of Directors appoints the Executive Director who manages the day-to-day operations of the organization.

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Angela Butler, *Director*
Eyak

Nanci Robart, *Director*
Tatitlek

Angela Vanderpool
Executive Director

Nupuat Newsletter - Call for Submissions

Do you have an update, story, essay, or poem to share? We welcome submissions from Tribal and community members, councils, and employees. Please email your ideas, articles, poetry, and photos to media@chugachmiut.org. The submission deadline for the next edition is Friday, Feb. 28, 2025.