

Ancient methods supplement health care

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP)—Ancient Alaska Native healing techniques will soon supplement modern-day treatments for mental health ailments afflicting Alaskans returning from service in the Middle East.

Many Alaska National Guard soldiers come from isolated villages. Few have doctors; fewer yet have mental health professionals.

So traditional healers like Kenny Timberwolf will use talking circles, steam houses and subsistence hunts to help Native soldiers relieve their stress.

"Honoring them and welcoming them home as a veteran isn't enough," said Kenny Timberwolf, an Alaska Native shaman. "It has to go a lot deeper."

Timberwolf said like others, some Native veterans will have problems readjusting to life at home when they return in October, and Bush communities, because of their extreme isolation, need to start preparing now for their arrival.

"That lingering feeling of being in combat is going to be there," he said.

The soldiers, who are part of the largest Alaska National Guard deployment since World War II, have been gone for almost a year. The unit represents 81 different communities and more than a half dozen cultures, including Eskimos, Tlingits, Haidas, Aleuts and Athabascans.

It can be easy for people whose lives have been so disrupted to slip into depression, alcoholism or crime. "We need to have a healing process that doesn't have labels," Timberwolf said.

Native healing methods—ranging from placing hands on a person's body in a therapeutic touch to participating in Native songs and dances—can do that, said traditional healing tribal doctor Lisa Dolchok, of the Alaska Native Medical Center.

They are part of the holistic approach that is a common thread to traditional healing, which teaches people that they are responsible for their own recovery.

"Traditional healing for us in this state is the norm, and Western medicine is new to us," she said.

Talking circles and other traditional counseling techniques are the most accessible options for many returning soldiers because of the extended families found in many villages, said Dr. Ted Mala, director of the center's Traditional Healing Program.

"I think there are many different roads to health," he said. "Traditional healing is important because we take the healing that's come from our ancestors and hand it down."

On the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, an area the size of Oregon, 109 Guardsmen from 25 villages were deployed last October with the Alaska National Guard's 3rd Battalion, 297th Infantry.

"We're preparing for our troops to come home with our existing staffing and funding," said Danielle Dizon, a spokeswoman for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. "It's such a massive area, we can only provide so much."

There are 25 tribal health centers across the state. Only about half of them have doctors, said Chris Mandregan, Alaska area director for the Indian Health Ser-

vice, a government agency. The rest make due with midlevel providers: physician's assistants and nurse practitioners.

There are 176 small villages across the state that have clinics, he said, but those are staffed by people who complete at least one six-week training course in basic medical care, similar to an EMT.

Behavioral health aides are beginning to show up in some villages, but services remain limited.

"Recruitment and retention is very, very difficult in some of these areas," Mandregan said.

Partly for those reasons, his organization tries to incorporate traditional healing practices—acupuncture, steam houses, manipulation of joints, prayer, smudging and healing herbs—into contemporary medicine where possible, he said.

Mandregan said he thought traditional healing could be of particular use because some Natives remain distrustful of Western medicine, he said.

"They're nervous about it, and they'll often consult with a tribal healer first," he said.

Western Shoshone leader dies at 87

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Corbin Harney, a spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone who challenged the federal government — and once his own tribe — to oppose nuclear weapons on aboriginal land has died at the age of 87.

Harney, a fixture at anti-nuclear rallies, died Tuesday of complications from cancer near Santa Rosa, Calif., where he had hoped to finish a book, according to his family.

"We have truly lost a lot," said his nephew, Santiago Lozada, who was with him when he died.

"Corbin was a World War II veteran and was known around the world for his activism against radioactivity and nuclear weapons," said Robert Hager, Reno-based lawyer for the Western Shoshone tribe. "He's irreplaceable to the Western Shoshone nation."

"He was someone who just had this gentle spirit but a steely resolve that people should do the right thing," Hager said.

Hager recalled that Harney bucked his own tribe when the federal government in the 1950s unearthed remains of Western Shoshone ancestors during digging for nuclear testing at the Nevada Test Site north of Las Vegas.

"He picked up the remains and gave them a decent burial," Hager said. "He took a lot of flack from Western Shoshone leaders who said he should have nothing to do with the U.S. government. But I always respected Corbin for doing what, to the Western Shoshone, was not politically correct but in his mind was the right thing to do."

Ian Zabarte, secretary of state for the Western Shoshone National Council, said Harney "was always steadfast in trying to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and guard the people against the threats that nuclear technology poses."

Creek name change considered after complaints

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (AP)—Linn County conservation officials will consider whether to change the name of Squaw Creek and Squaw Creek Park after receiving a complaint from someone who was offended by the use of the word "squaw."

Craig Van Berkum, an American Indian from Las Vegas, wrote a letter to county officials a few weeks ago saying he was attending a family function at the park and was surprised to see that it was at a place called Squaw Creek Park, said Dennis Goemaat, deputy county conservation director.

He said Van Berkum, who once lived in Pella, said he found the name offensive.

Goemaat said his office receives about one complaint a year about the name of the park and creek.

The county conservation board will consider changing the name at a meeting on Monday, he said.

"We want the board to be aware of the recent letter and get some sense of how to approach it," Goemaat said. "From the standpoint that parks should be inviting to everybody, we are serious about it."

Alcohol ban mostly lifted for North American Indian Days

BROWNING, Mont. (AP)—The Blackfeet Tribe's ban on alcohol sales during North American Indian Days, in effect since 1999, has been mostly lifted, pleasing some business owners but stunning tribal substance-abuse counselors who pushed for the alcohol ban.

"This sets us back about 10 years," said Herman Whitegrass, counselor at the Crystal Creek Lodge, the tribe's chemical dependency center.

Councilman Rodney Gervais said bars, restaurants, lodges and the Glacier Peaks casino will be allowed to sell alcohol on site during the

four-day powwow, which starts Thursday.

"I've heard a lot of negative comments about the alcohol ban, so this would be a very welcome thing," said Walt Kochansky, general manager of the St. Mary Lodge and Resort.

Selling packaged alcohol will be allowed from 6 p.m. until 2 a.m., Gervais said.

"But our cultural areas are completely off limits to any alcohol, and that includes the Indian encampment," Gervais said. "We've hired 40 additional security (guards) to enforce it on the campgrounds."

June Tatsey was one who lobbied for the alcohol ban during the four-day event, which includes

drum and dance contests and traditional sporting competitions.

"We wanted safety on our reservation for our youth," she said Tuesday. "We had auto accidents for five weekends in a row that were killing our teenagers."

The first alcohol-free powwow was held in 1999 and court statistics suggested the ban was effective in deterring crime, with fewer citations for open containers, disorderly conduct and public intoxication than the previous year.

Gervais said the business council looked at different statistics.

"We found that the death rate goes up by 8.8 percent, accidents

go up, and the suicides go up by 47 percent on dry reservations," he said.

Darrell Norman, owner of the Lodgepole Gallery in Browning, said the business council has been under a lot of pressure to change the law.

"People said you could drive to East Glacier or to Cut Bank to get alcohol, which only leads to more drunks on our highways," he said.

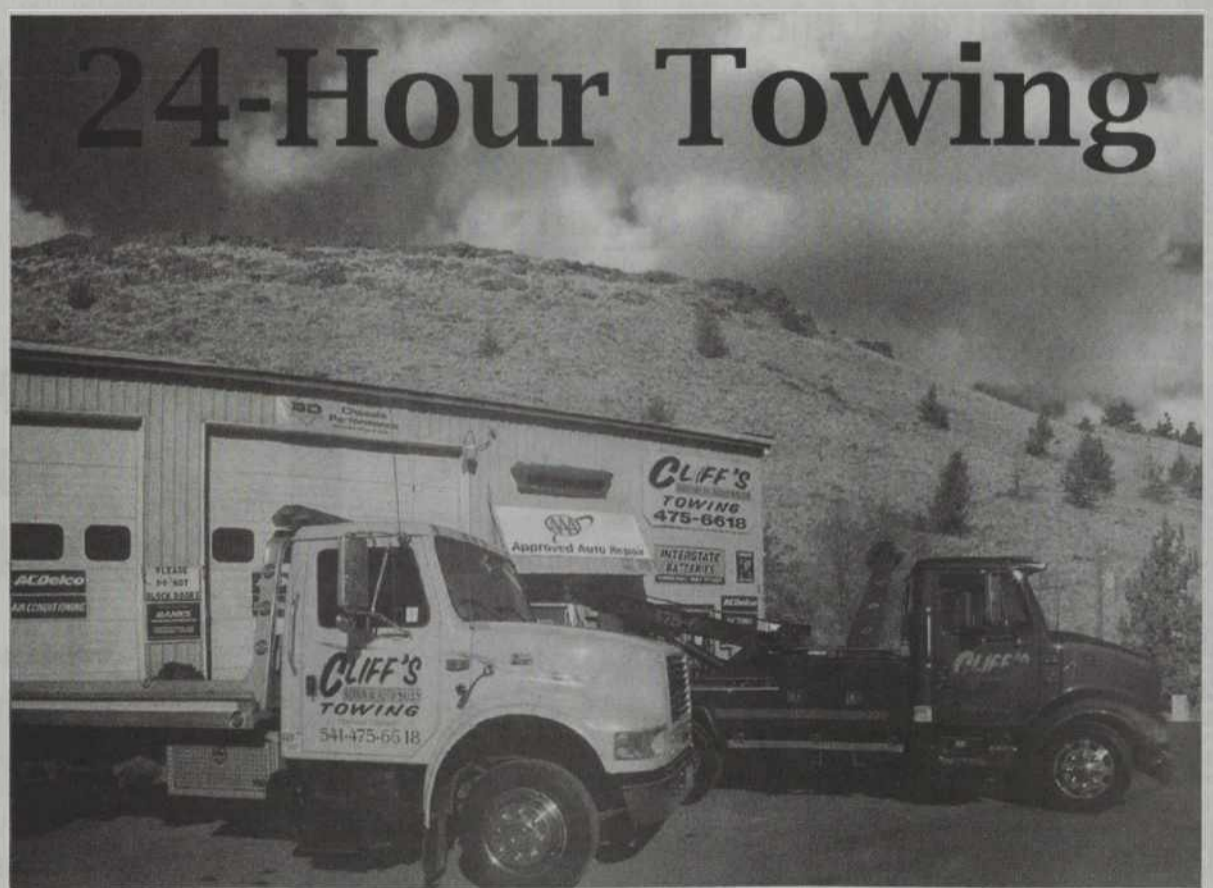
Gervais said the ban on selling alcohol on the reservation during North American Indian Days simply didn't work.

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