OUR HEARTS TOGETHER
31st Annual Rural Providers’ Conference

31st Annual Rural Providers’ Conference Summary

Fairbanks, Alaska
June 16-20, 2014

RURAL ALASKA COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM, INC.
TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE
BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Over the last 31 years, the Rural Providers’ Conference (RPC) has become a leading force for the state’s growing sobriety movement. The RPC, also called the Gathering, was started in response to the sobriety initiative among Alaska Native communities in the early 1980s. Those involved in the movement saw a need to create a partnership to share information and resources. The first Gathering was held in 1983 in Anchorage and was sponsored by the Alaska State Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse (ADA) and was initially intended for staff in rural Alaska programs that were funded by ADA. It was at the end of the first meeting when Anna Frank of Fairbanks suggested that the people in rural Alaska who were served by the programs should be included in the design of RPC.

Since then conference participants have planned and facilitated each Gathering while Rural CAP, the co-hosting Alaska Native regional organizations and other sponsors provide logistical support. The annual event has blossomed to include participants from across the state and beyond.

The Gathering serves as a forum where rural providers share resources that are culturally relevant to the Alaska Native way of life. The conference features traditional ways of celebrating and sharing this information, including talking circles, fiddle dancing, traditional storytelling and potlucks. Community representatives share approaches that are working well in their communities. The Gathering unifies and empowers. It serves as a networking center and as a training ground for community leaders. It encourages the creation of community-based solutions and collaboration of community efforts to reduce substance abuse and promote wellness.

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<tr>
<th>RPC Host Communities</th>
<th>1984</th>
<th>Anchorage</th>
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<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
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<td>1987-88</td>
<td>Copper Center/Glennallen</td>
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<td>1989-90</td>
<td>Tok/Tanacross</td>
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<td>1991-92</td>
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<td>1993-94</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
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<td>2003-04</td>
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<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Bethel</td>
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<td>2007-08</td>
<td>Copper Center/Glennallen</td>
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<td>2009-10</td>
<td>Kodiak</td>
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<td>2011-12</td>
<td>Dillingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>Fairbanks</td>
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Our Hearts Together
31st Annual Rural Providers’ Conference

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About the Conference
The Rural Providers’ Conference (RPC) is an annual gathering of substance abuse service providers, youth, Elders and family members interested in celebrating and encouraging the continual growth of the Alaska Native Sobriety Movement. The RPC embraces and unites traditional Alaska Native knowledge and modern methods in the development of the community and personal wellness. The RPC features ceremonies, talking circles and cultural events. Workshops and general sessions are geared toward those in recovery, Elders, youth, clinicians and service providers in rural Alaska, and others. The 2014 RPC was jointly sponsored by the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP) and the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC).

The local planning committee came up with the theme, “Our Hearts Together.” When we change our attitudes and open our hearts, everything else changes around us. This is when we get to the root of our addiction and the beginning of our journey that will continue for a long time. Local Co-Chair Roxanne Frank said, “We are going to go to the root of what’s going on. I kept thinking of the heart, how we have to go to the heart. We need to share our hearts.”

Photo taken of Denali by Amy Modig

Credits
Cover Photo: Jerry Isaac (center) at the RPC Circle Talks. Photo by Angela Gonzalez
RPC Logo Artwork: Doreen Deaton and Rachel Saylor of Tanana Chiefs Conference
Photos: RurAL CAP and TCC Staff and Volunteers
Design & Layout: Angela Gonzalez

Photo taken of Denali by Amy Modig

Our Hearts Together
FRED JOHN, JR.
Fred John, Jr. was born January 3, 1943 in Susluta Alaska to the last traditional chief of Mentasta, Fred John, Sr. and Native rights advocate Katie John. Fred is the sixth child of 14 biological and six adopted children. He was raised in the traditional lifestyle during his younger years but as the State of Alaska began to regulate education, he was among the first of many Native children across the state that were sent to boarding school. Fred was seven years old when he left with his siblings to attend school at Wrangell, Alaska. After two years, of abuse and being referred to as only a number (77), he and his siblings were then brought home. Following this long separation, his father fought to keep the family intact. Fred Sr. moved the family to Dot Lake to be closer to a school as it was mandated that the children attend. Unfortunately, the harsh winter and lack of adequate housing was too much and the children were forced to return to Wrangell located over 700 miles away.

After graduating from high school in 1963, Fred attended college at Haskell Institute. He completed two years, then joined the Navy. Traveling all over the world, Fred saw new cultures and experienced a life unheard of in Mentasta. He was able to call to the one phone at the village lodge occasionally and let his family know where he was stationed. It was during his time in the Navy that he was injured. While stationed in San Diego, Fred nearly lost his life in a terrible accident. He spent 18 months in the hospital learning to walk, talk and live on his own again. This was some of his most lonely moments and he states, “Watching my ship leave, not being able to contact my family and being in a big city where I felt forgotten. This was the loneliness that I felt when I was taken away from my parents as a child.”

After a long road of recovery, Fred returned to Alaska as a disabled Veteran. Although he was healed physically, he was emotionally drained. He took a path which led to alcohol addiction. He eventually turned to Christ for help and family for support. He also went to the Old Minto Recovery Camp run by Tanana Chiefs Conference. Going back to his traditional roots and being in a cultural setting was healing. After recovery, Fred became involved in Old Minto and soon joined as a recovery counselor.

After his mother passed in 2013, Fred found himself on the forefront continuing her legacy while carrying on the traditions of the Athabascan culture. He now spends his time writing and advocating on behalf of the rights of Alaska Native people.

Fred is 71 years old and celebrates 37 years of marriage with his wife, Linnea. He is surrounded by six children, Frankie, Gwendolyn, Genevieve, Reuben, Vanessa and Alma. He is blessed with ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Fred John, Jr. will continue his family’s legacy and is looking forward to more adventures in his journey of life.
LUKE TITUS
Luke Titus, 73, second oldest of eight siblings, was born in Tanana, Alaska to Elsie and Robert Titus of Minto. While his mother and father were busy providing for the family, he lived with his uncle Daniel Jimmie. He was raised in a subsistence lifestyle until he went to boarding school in Wrangell and graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe High School in 1962. He spent summers in Minto helping his parents care for his two younger sisters and four younger brothers.

Luke joined the National Guard after graduating from high school. Going as far as basic training, he was discharged due to health problems. Joining the workforce for a short time, he then went to school at Cook Christian Theological School in Tempe, Arizona. That is where he met his wife, Alice, and they have been happily married for 45 years. They raised five beautiful children, and now have 13 grandchildren.

Luke has served on the Yukon Koyukuk School District School Board and on the Minto Village Council. He also helped start up the Old Minto Family Recovery Camp in Old Minto as a Substance Abuse Counselor which is now operated by the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

Luke loves being in the great outdoors camping, hunting, fishing, hauling wood, or just going for walks.

EVON PETER
Evon Peter is a loving father to three daughters and a son. He works in partnership with his wife Enei Begaye Peter to offer wellness, leadership development, and sustainability initiatives in Alaska and among the Navajo. Among many roles, he has served as Chief of the Neetsaii Gwich’in, Co-Chair to the Gwich’in Council International, and Vice-Chairman to the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments.

Evon has traveled around the world in service as a facilitator, strategic planner, and speaker. Over the last four years he has worked in many Alaskan villages and out on the land organizing culturally-based prevention programs to address suicide, violence, and abuse. He holds a degree in Alaska Native Studies with a minor in Political Science and has completed all coursework towards a Masters in Rural Development from the University of Alaska Fairbanks.
SPECIAL GUESTS & PRESENTATIONS

Bea Shawanda of Canada returned to the RPC and presented on suicide prevention and wellness initiatives. Bea was an honorary Stakeholder this year.

Photo by Amy Modig

Venerable Anna Frank emceed and addressed the audience several times during the RPC. A well-respected Elder, she was a keynote presenter at the 2013 RPC.

Photo by Amy Modig

Members of the Returning to Harmony group, including Linda Joule (above), Pat Frank, Ole Lake (at left), and Elizabeth Sunnyboy, presented on the topic of wellness and healing. The presenters identified and shared ways to respond to the 2013 AFN Convention Alaska Youth Call to Action at the village community level. Participants gained a greater understanding of building harmony at home, at work and in the community by finding solutions to alcoholism and abuse through an understanding of the causes.

Ole Lake (at left) discussed a harpoon ceremony held at the Returning to Harmony trainings earlier in the year.

Photos by Angela Gonzalez
A Suicide Prevention Action Planning session was held. Several speakers made presentations on what they are doing in their communities to prevent suicide. Speakers included Ionia Community members (above), George Attla II (at right above), Dr. Gary Ferguson (at right), Bea Shawanda and Alakanuk Community members. A discussion was held after the presentations on what is going on today, how to apply prevention planning and what community members are learning about substance abuse and suicide prevention. Doug Modig of Gathering of Eagles coordinated the session.

Photos by Angela Gonzalez

The Winter Bear play was performed during the conference. The Winter Bear is the story of Athabascan teenager Duane “Shadow” David who is contemplating suicide when he is sentenced to cut wood for Koyukon Athabascan Elder Sidney Huntington. Initially, the two are unable to communicate, but they gradually find a shared language based on the old man’s hunting experience and the young man’s video game vocabulary. Together they construct a Bear Spear in the old traditional way. Soon after, Duane is forced to kill a marauding Winter Bear using only the Spear. Sidney is wounded in the encounter so Duane, who’s deathly afraid of showing himself in any public way, must stand in the spotlight and speak for Sidney at the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention. The suicide prevention theme was discussed in the Circle Talks following the play.

Photos by Angela Gonzalez
CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

There were many events held during the RPC, including the Opening Ceremonies, Potluck and Native Dancing, Fashion/Talent Show, and a sobriety dance. Healthy activities provide a strong foundation on the journey to wellness.

The Native Veterans of Fairbanks perform the Color Guard ceremony (at left). Tanana Chiefs Conference President Victor Joseph (at right) welcomes attendees to the 2014 Rural Providers’ Conference. Photos by Angela Gonzalez

A welcome reception was held on the opening day. Many supporters made welcome remarks. Photos by Angela Gonzalez

Attendees had fun at the Sobriety Dance. The Athabascan Fiddlers Association provided fiddle music. Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Geri Simon of Doyon, Limited

Jana George of Interior Regional Housing Authority

Steve Ginnis of Fairbanks Native Association

David Hardenbergh of RurAL CAP
A Fashion and Talent Show was held one evening. The Henry family sings an Athabascan song for the Talent Show.
Photo by Joie Brown

Yatibaey Evans displays her traditional Athabascan dress at the Talent Show.
Photo by Amy Modig

Talent Show attendees enjoy Nellie Northway’s presentation of her traditional regalia.
Photo by Amy Modig

Nastasia Kassel, a BIRCH AmeriCorps Member from Kasigluk, serves food at the RPC Potlatch.
Photo by Amy Modig

RPC attendees at the RPC Potlatch. Cooks and volunteers prepare to serve moose soup.
Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Inupiaq singers and dancers perform at the RPC Potlatch. An invitational dance was held after their performance.
Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Athabascan singers and dancers perform at the RPC Potlatch.
Photo by Amy Modig
The RPC Youth Track is a training opportunity for teens attending the Gathering. Topics included leadership, wellness, healthy family relationships, Native Youth Olympics demonstration, substance abuse and prevention, and theatre games. Youth attended morning sessions with all other participants followed by youth workshops in the afternoon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop Titles</th>
<th>Presenters</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Field Trip to University of Alaska Fairbanks Swimming Pool for Boating Safety</td>
<td>Tanana Chiefs Conference and State of Alaska Office of Boating Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy and Safe Youth Fair</td>
<td>Tanana Chiefs Conference Tribal Health and Safety Partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ice Breakers &amp; Introductions</td>
<td>Sources of Strength Team Members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Songs</td>
<td>Travis Cole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Youth Olympics</td>
<td>Erica Meckel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Strength Peer Leader Training</td>
<td>Mark LoMurray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STDs, Pregnancy, Birth Control</td>
<td>Paula Cinero, State of Alaska Public Health Nurse</td>
</tr>
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Travis Cole inspires youth with his stories about culture and Native songs.
Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Youth volunteered by cooking and serving at the potlatch.
Pastor Luke Titus demonstrates how to cut up moose tongue.
Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Mark LoMurray talks to RPC youth about utilizing the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture and ultimately prevent suicide, bullying and substance abuse.
Photo by Angela Gonzalez
Brandon Williams of Huslia attempts the one-foot high kick. Other attendees also had a chance to try NYO games.

Photos by Angela Gonzalez

Erica Meckel talks about the importance of living a sober life and that participation in Native Youth Olympics (NYO) provides positive results among youth.

Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Youth Track attendees participate in an activity with Mark LoMurray.

Photo by Angela Gonzalez
The workshops were chosen by the Local Planning Committee with support and suggestions from the Statewide Planning Committee. They reviewed last year’s RPC evaluations, which included a list of topics participants wanted to learn more about. A request for workshop proposals was then circulated to potential presenters. Four concurrent workshops were held in the afternoons and some were extended into two parts.

Conference organizers applied for State of Alaska Board Certification credits for various disciplines and Alaska Commission for Behavioral Health Certification (ACBHC). Attendees completed a certification form to record the sessions they attended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop Titles</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska Gatekeepers - Question, Persuade and Refer (QPR)</td>
<td>Sarah McConnell (University of Alaska Fairbanks), Valerie Bergman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring for Ourselves So We Can Be Present for Others</td>
<td>Becky Judd (RurAL CAP), Dr. Gary Ferguson (ANTHC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEO Group Re-entry Services</td>
<td>Stacy Cross, Chantal Harris, Te'Anna Healy, Shirley Holmberg (All with North Star Center)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy Sexuality</td>
<td>Paula Ciniero (State of Alaska Public Health Nurse), Debbie Demienteff (Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium-ANTHC), Shirley Moses (ANTHC Trainer/Advocate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical Trauma-Historic Strengths - Navigating Wellness</td>
<td>Laverne Demientieff (University of Alaska Fairbanks Social Work Department), Jessica Black (University of Alaska Fairbanks), Elizabeth Fleagle (Elder)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hope and Belonging: Cultural and Community Strengths for Suicide Prevention</td>
<td>Sarah McConnell (Univ. of Alaska Fairbanks), Elizabeth Fleagle (Elder)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lethality of Domestic Violence: A Daughter's Loss</td>
<td>Debbie Demientieff (ANTHC) and ANTHC Trainers/Advocates Jennessy Andrew, Shirley Moses and Linda McLaughlin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making Healthy Choices about Substance Abuse</td>
<td>Rene Rouzan (Alaska Native Justice Center)</td>
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<td>Memory Management</td>
<td>George Kirchner (Rural Community Consultants)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native It’s Your Game</td>
<td>Connie Jessen and Jennifer Williamson (ANTHC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicotine Addiction and Sobriety</td>
<td>Nick Gonzales (Akeela Prevention Services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacing Self-Medication with Cultural Tools and Strengths to Manage the Negative Effects of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>Debbie Demientieff (ANTHC), Tia Holley (ANTHC Trainer/Advocate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Returning to Harmony (Part 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Linda Joule, Pat Frank, Ole Lake, Elizabeth Sunnyboy (Returning to Harmony)</td>
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<td>Storytelling: Walking the Path of Your Heroic Journey</td>
<td>Dorothy Dunne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthening Sobriety by Being Tobacco Free</td>
<td>Amy Modig (RurAL CAP), Sonia Vent (RurAL CAP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unlearning Oppression</td>
<td>Doug Modig (Gathering of Eagles)</td>
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Dr. Gary Ferguson and Becky Judd present a workshop on the importance of self-care.

Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Nick Gonzales talks about nicotine addiction and sobriety.

Photo by Angela Gonzalez

Sonia Vent presents about being tobacco-free.

Photo by Amy Modig

**Justice Track Workshops**

For the third year in a row, the RPC offered a Tribal Justice Track to raise awareness regarding the unique healing and therapeutic needs of communities, families, adults, youth, and children impacted by the justice system. The Justice Track included three workshops on how tribal court and therapeutic practitioners are collaborating to build culture-based healing and wellness initiatives throughout rural Alaska.

- **Breaking the Cycle of Native Incarceration and Recidivism is the Key to the Future of Indigenous People, Tribes, and their Communities** with Shirley Lee of Tanana Chiefs Conference and Kimberly Martus of Bristol Bay Native Association
- **Tribal Courts in Alaska** with Kevin Illingworth of University of Alaska Fairbanks
- **Tribal-State Collaboration on Misdemeanors and Juvenile Delinquency to Support Sobriety** with Department of Juvenile Justice and Tanana Chiefs Conference

Kevin Illingworth holds a workshop on Tribal Courts in Alaska.

Photo by Angela Gonzalez
STAKING CEREMONY

The Staking Ceremony was introduced to the Rural Providers’ Conference in 1986 to signify the commitment to sobriety. The involvement in the ceremony is a public declaration of one’s intention for wellness, because it is made in public with those one respects or honors.

The Staking Ceremony’s roots lay in a battle between the Mandan Indians and the Lakota Sioux. According to the legend, a Mandan warrior “staked” himself to the earth during a battle with the Lakota. He believed so strongly in his cause that he refused to retreat. A Lakota Elder was so impressed by the Mandan warrior’s courage, honor and commitment to his people that he stopped the Sioux who were about to kill him, saying, “Even in an enemy, we must honor this example.” Instead, they nursed the warrior back to health and returned him to his people.

Since its symbolic reenactment years ago by a small group in Canada, the modern staking ceremony has grown tremendously with stakeholders all over the country. Phil Lane Jr. of Alberta, Canada introduced the ceremony to Alaska in 1986. In the RPC’s modern staking ceremony, participants declare their commitment to wellness.

The small stakes in the ceremony symbolize the warrior’s spear. It is a way of “tying” oneself to the spear and facing the enemy. The stakes are always decorated with black, white, yellow and red. Black represents the West and African American people; white is for the North and White people; Yellow is the East and Yellow People; and Red stands for the South and Red people. Each RPC participant is given a stake to take home that reminds them of their commitment to wellness for themselves and their loved ones.

The first ceremony had one couple represent each Alaskan culture, and included an original bundle of stakes. The first holders of the bundle were Doug Modig of Ketchikan and Amy Lohr of Tanacross. They expanded the circle and passed the bundle to John and Teresa Pingayak of Chevak in 1991 and they in turn passed the bundle to Reggie and Linda Joule of Kotzebue in 1995. The bundle in 1999 was then passed to Randy Mayo and Violet Hunt of Stevens Village. The circle was expanded to include two couples, Ed and Priscilla Peele and Tom and Jennifer Young of Sitka, all of whom held the bundle from 2003-2009. Fred and Irene Coyle of Kodiak carried the bundle from 2009-2011. In 2012, the bundle was passed to JD and Deedee Bennis of Dillingham. Over the years, the circle was also expanded to include Shirley Holmberg, Carol Rose and Amanda Peele who represent single women. Thomas Tilden joined the Stakeholders in 2012 to represent single men.
THANK YOU PLANNERS AND VOLUNTEERS!

**Fairbanks Local Committee Co-Chairs**  
Valerie Derendoff, TCC and Roxanne Frank, TCC

**Local Planning Committee Members**  
Shirley Holmberg, North Star  
Carol Rose  
Karen Eddy, TCC  
Shawna Hildebrand, TCC  
Doreen Deaton, TCC  
Karlene Manuel, TCC  
Lisa Jaeger, TCC  
Glenn Carlo, Dennakkanaga  
Renee Linton, Big Brother Big Sisters

**RPC Stakeholders**  
JD and DeeDee Bennis  
Fred and Irene Coyle  
Shirley Holmberg  
Reggie and Linda Joule  
Randy Mayo and Violet Hunt  
Doug and Amy Modig  
Amanda Peele  
Ed and Priscilla Peele  
John and Teresa Pingayak  
Carol Rose  
Thomas Tilden  
Bea Shawanda (2014 Honorary)

**Statewide Planning Committee Members**  
Perry Ahsogeak, Fairbanks Native Association  
DeeDee Bennis, Bristol Bay Native Association  
Joseph Cantil, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium  
Fred and Irene Coyle  
Margaret David, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium  
Nick Gonzalez, Akeela, Inc.  
Shirley Holmberg, North Star  
Doug Modig, Gathering of Eagles  
Amy Modig, RurAL CAP  
Ed and Priscilla Peele  
Michael Powell, State of Alaska, Div. of Behavioral Health

**Youth Track Planners**  
Shawna Hildebrand, TCC and Karen Eddy, TCC

**Statewide Conference Coordinator**  
Bridget McCleskey, Owner, Conference Coordinators, LLC

**RurAL CAP Staff**  
Joie Brown  
Cathie Clements  
Sandra Erickson  
Angela Gonzalez  
TJ Snell  
Dan Kelly

RurAL CAP board and staff members thank organizers from Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) and the local planning committee.  
Left-right: Shirley Holmberg, Roxanne Frank, Valerie Derendoff, Joie Brown, Cathie Clements, Jacqueline Dailey (RurAL CAP Board President) and Steve Longley (RurAL CAP Board Vice-President).  
Photo by Angela Gonzalez
THANK YOU SPONSORS AND PARTNERS!

RurAL CAP and the Tanana Chiefs Conference would like to thank the following organizations, businesses, individuals and sponsors. Core funding is provided by the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. Funding is also provided by the Alaska Division of Health & Human Services - Division of Behavioral Health. Other funders include Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Indian Health Service (IHS), Methamphetamine and Suicide Prevention Initiative (MSPI), Behavioral Health Aide program (BHA) and the Strategic Planning Framework (SPF). If you or your organization would like to help sponsor the 2015 RPC in Nome, please contact Joie Brown at (907) 865-7356.

Co-Hosts

Tanana Chiefs Conference

RurAL CAP

Golden Heart Sponsor (over $5,000)

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**Fish Wheel ($150-$249)**

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Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium  •  Alaska Railroad
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Designer’s Closet  •  Fairbanks Rescue Mission
Geo North/North Star  •  Jade’s Boutique
Kwikpak Fisheries  •  Ravn Alaska  •  Roxanne Frank
Sam’s Club  •  State of Alaska Office of Boating
Tans N Tea  •  Turtle Club  •  Westmark Hotel

Join us at the next RPC in Nome, Alaska on June 1-4, 2015!