



## Press Release

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### **Joint-Jurisdiction State-Tribal Henu' Community Wellness Court grand opening celebration scheduled** *Event begins at 1 p.m. Friday, June 23, in Kenai*

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe, in partnership with the State of Alaska, will host a grand opening celebration for the Henu' Community Wellness Court from 1 to 2:15 p.m. Friday, June 23. The ceremony will be held at the Kenaitze Tribal Courthouse at 507 Overland St. in Kenai.

A court hearing open to the public will follow at 2:30 p.m. in Classroom 2 of the Dena'ina Wellness Center adjacent to the courthouse.

"To open this court is a monumental accomplishment for the tribe, our community and the entire state," said Kim Sweet, the tribe's Chief Tribal Judge. "It's been a long journey to get here, and we could not be more excited to begin seeing the positive influence this court has on families across the area."

Henu' is a joint-jurisdictional state-tribal, healing-to-wellness court operated in partnership between the tribe and Alaska Court System. Sweet and Kenai Superior Court Judge Anna Moran sit beside each other during hearings.

"The Kenai court and the Kenaitze court have a deep commitment to their community and to resolving substance abuse issues that affect the well-being of our community. The court is an important resource for our community and I am proud to be part of this innovative court," said Judge Moran.

The court, which began hearing cases earlier this year, serves adults who face legal trouble stemming from substance use. It targets drug and alcohol offenders – including those in families with Children in Need of Aid cases – living in the tribe's service area. Defendants charged with property crimes may also be considered if the offense stems from substance use.

Henu' aims to get to the root of participants' struggles, giving them resources to pursue sobriety as an alternative to going to jail. The program is rigorous – it takes about 18 months to complete – but is designed to help offenders reestablish themselves in the community.

When accepted into the program, participants gain access to safe housing, transportation, clothing and personal hygiene supplies, and more. Program capacity is about 20.

Completion of the program can offer a more favorable outcome than what is available through the traditional court system, but an unsuccessful attempt at completing it will never result in a harsher punishment than a traditional court would impose.

“The resources available through the court align with the tribe’s Dene’ Philosophy of Care, which takes a whole-person approach toward wellness,” said Jaylene Peterson-Nyren, the tribe’s Executive Director. “The tribe strives to help people achieve complete mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellness – and this project truly embodies that effort. We are incredibly grateful to the many people who helped make this court possible.”

The grand opening ceremony also will include remarks from tribal leadership, court representatives and key partners, including keynote speaker Korey Wahwassuck, a district judge in Minnesota who helped create the country’s first joint-jurisdiction wellness court in 2007.