



Qizhjah Vena Alaska

We Are Celebrating!!! Again!

Re: Paying off the Loan to Purchase Dena'ina Ancestral Homelands

November 7, 2025

In our 2024 newsletter we announced that we received a loan from NDN Collective to purchase 'Koksetna Lodge'. This lodge sits on five acres of land located at the mouth of Chulitna River which drains into Qizhjah Vena, known today as Lake Clark. We were given a year grace period before monthly payments would start. It is with deep gratitude and excitement that we, the team of Qizhjah Vena Alaska (QVA), announce that we have paid off the loan to purchase 'Koksetna Lodge'! We are calling the lodge the **Center**, for now.

Over the winter our team worked to pay off the loan and the generosity of foundations has surpassed our expectations. In August 2025 we successfully paid off the \$850K loan! This accomplishment is a testament of our goals and vision for this place and it couldn't have happened without our partners, supporters, monthly donors, foundations, and those who shared their time, skills, and energy. We appreciate every thought and action of good will for our efforts.

Additionally, in June, we celebrated the 11th year of Quk' Taz'un Outdoor Leadership Camp that is held at historic Kijik. In collaboration with the Nondalton Tribal Council, the Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, and Kenaitze Indian Tribe, we hosted close to thirty youth and adults. The theme of the camp was **Honoring Dena'ina Music and Ceremony** along with an emphasis on Dena'ina language. We are happy to announce that we'll be collaborating with the Nondalton Tribal Council again in 2026 to host the 12th year of Quk' Taz'un - stay tuned on our website for updates to sign up.

In collaboration with the Nondalton Tribal Council, QVA coordinated and supported an immersive retreat for the Nondalton Tribal Council, the QVA Board of Directors and the Advisory Committee, in February 2025. The Insight Alliance offered the guidance and program for this retreat. The Insight Alliance was invited back to Alaska to host another retreat at the Center in August. Their mission is to work with people to uncover "the natural resilience and innate mental health all human beings have inside them. They teach a simple understanding of how our feelings, experiences, and state of mind work, allowing people to hit 'reset' and change from the inside out." Their program is offered to the general public and the underserved

including in prisons and in communities for youth and adults impacted by systems of oppression. Their educational model can benefit all people. In addition, “the fundamental premise of their training is to create the best possible space for a “quiet mind” so that one can experience an intuitive understanding as opposed to learning something at a rational level.”

At the August retreat, residents from the community of Nondalton joined us at the Center and one participant commented that the retreat was the best retreat they had ever been to. This model directly aligns with QVA’s mission and vision and four QVA team members have been trained to offer this service, combining our own Dena’ina model for health and well-being with this program. This will be something offered in the future.

We want to re-emphasize that our goal for purchasing this lodge (*Center*) and land is much bigger than us. Our plan is to create a space for healing, connection, and growth for our region and globally. As we reflect on our mission, values, and vision; our team is looking ahead and planning to take time at the Center to sit and feel into what the spirit of the land says to us; asking the land: What does it want from us? This means slowing down and taking the time to listen and connect.

2025 has also brought change; we have expanded our board from three members to five. We welcomed Bianca Jensen of Pedro Bay, Jennifer Williams of Lime Village, and Heather Kendall-Miller who has family ties to Qizhjah Vena. We expanded our board to include the broader Dena’ina circle of women from different communities, and to honor and remember the importance of interdependence and support between communities. As we welcome new board members, we send deep gratitude to Fawn Silas, one of our co-founders, for dedicating all of her time, energy, and expertise to the vision of QVA - we couldn’t have done this without her. We also hired Danielle Stickman as our new Executive Director and QVA’s first full time employee. QVA received an EPA Thriving Communities Grant this spring as well, that focuses on cultural revitalization, knowledge transfer, and infrastructure improvement. We have other projects in tow and will share as they get started.

In humble partnership with the natural world and motivated by Dena’ina values, we continue learning from the land and from each other. Chin’an for continuing to travel with us on this journey and please reach out if you have any questions about upcoming programs, ideas or anything else of interest.

Respectfully,

Karen Evanoff, Kiana Till, Heather Kendall-Miller, Jennifer Williams, and Bianca Jensen; *Staff*: Danielle Stickman

Support Team: Fawn Silas, Pauline Hobson, AlexAnna Salmon, Margaret Baldwin, Max Chickalusion, George Guyver, Chase Rodriguez, Monty Rogers.



All of this would not be possible without the following key partners, Chin’an gheli:

Nondalton Tribal Council, Kataly Foundation, Igiugig Village Council, NDN Collective, Native Movement, the Alaska Venture Fund, Tamalpais Trust, Indigenous Knowledge Holders Fund of RSF Social Finance, Cold Mountain Fund, Charlotte Martin Foundation, Erin Johnson Memorial Fund, Worldwide Indigenous Science Network, Alaska SBDC, Ruth Miller, and others.