

Interpreter kept the patients' spirits up

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

Rena Anawrok left Our Lady Of Compassion Care Center in Anchorage with tears in her eyes and a feeling of warmth in her heart.

After serving nearly five years as an interpreter between the Alaska Native patients and health care providers at the center, Anawrok decided it was time to move on and go back home to Unalakleet.

"I want to do more fishing and hunting," she said during a going away celebration at the center in her honor.

Anawrok, who was born in Shaktoolik, speaks three languages: Inupiat, Yupik and English.

Nearly one-third of the patients are Alaska Native so she has made many friends during the years.

Working at the center, Anawrok is employed through the Southcentral Foundation as a community health representative/interpreter.

Kathy Grosdidier, deputy director at Southcentral, said Anawrok has worked beyond the call of duty. She said Anawrok must be commended and recognized for her accomplishments at the center.

"Rena will be missed by everyone very much," she said.

"Patients even called her sister, aunt, grandmother, because she was all of those," Grosdidier said of the family-like closeness patients felt for Anawrok.

Although the burn-out rate for this type of profession is high, Anawrok loved her work. Grosdidier said Anawrok made the Native elders feel as much at home as she could.

"As interpreter, she was the one who asked what was wrong. Where does it hurt? Can I get anything for you? Or how do you feel today?" Grosdidier explained.

By knowing Alaska Native cultures and traditions, Anawrok also kept many of the patients' spirits up by sharing with them and listening to them.

"Some people might be frightened when they come here from a village, so Rena comforts them," said Barbara Sims, director of planning and marketing at the center.

Anawrok has won numerous awards and honors, among which have been the Alaska Federation of Natives president's award for health, Our Lady of Compassion award for caring, the Alaska Native Health Board commendation for community health representative.

Elena Gleason of Nunapitchuk, which is near Bethel, will take over Anawrok's position.



photos by Barbara Crane

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Above, Rena Anawrok, center, looks at a card as her grandson Leonard Delie, and her mother Lizzie Nakarak of Unalakleet look on. Among those gathered for Anawrok's party, at right, were, standing, her husband Nathan Anawrok, her daughter Helen Delie, sitting, from left, Anawrok, her grandson Joshua Delie, her mother Lizzie Nakarak and grandson Leonard Delie. Below, Anawrok is shown laughing with one of the residents of Our Lady Of Compassion Care Center, Jimmy Tumartok of Chevak.



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