Meet James Sears

Sears played a key role in the development of the new Valley Native Primary Care Center

By SCF Public Relations

While a new Valley Native Primary Care Center (VNPPC) had long been a shared dream between tribal leadership and the Alaska Native peoples of the region, and the land for the building site was purchased in 2006, resources were limited and the project needed a jumpstart. In June 2009, Southcentral Foundation (SCF) Director of Facilities James Sears worked with tribal leadership to request information from the Indian Health Service on how to apply for participation in its Joint Venture Construction Program. Under this program, authorized by the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act, the IHS committed to fund staffing, operations and maintenance of selected tribally owned health care facilities that were to be designed and constructed with non-IHS funds. Sears sent SCF’s letter of interest to the IHS Division of Facilities Planning and Construction and thus, his day-to-day involvement with the project began. Below, Sears shares his story and acknowledges other members of the SCF team who assisted with the project.

Q: How did your previous employment as an SCF special assistant prepare you for your role in the new VNPPC, Bentech Naath, building project?
A: As a special assistant in the SCF Resource and Development Division, under the leadership of vice president and chief of staff Dr. Kevin Gottlieb, I formed valuable relationships throughout the organization. These relationships enabled me to find the information and resources needed to complete the many steps involved in this project. Also important, I learned to manage complex processes, which was a necessary skill during the completion of our applications to the IHS and U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

Q: What were some of your responsibilities in the different phases of the building project?
A: As a special assistant in the SCF Resource and Development Division, I was involved in the purchase of the land in 2006. Then, three years later, as the new manager of facilities, I was responsible for working together with the SCF Planning and Grants and SCF Finance departments, and other employees from across the organization, to complete the IHS Joint Venture Construction Program application. In December 2009, SCF received the award notification from the IHS – which is the same month I became director of facilities. We had to begin planning the new facility utilizing the IHS planning process, so I quickly became responsible for managing the contract and coordinating the planning. In 2010, I worked with SCF Planning and Grants and SCF Finance once again to complete the USDA application, and I have been involved in the project almost daily ever since.

Building this facility required communication and coordination with multiple health care partners and agencies, including Knik and Chickaloon Village representatives, IHS, USDA, the design-build team, and most SCF divisions. I’d also like to specifically recognize the members of our ad-hoc funding/development team, which was comprised of individuals from the SCF Finance, Resource and Development, and Executive and Tribal Services Divisions, including Fred Kopacz, Chris Bragg, Ed Zernia, Marisa Wang, Gary Chythlook, Kristine Hestnes and Audrey Degrote.

Q: What, in your view, were the greatest accomplishments along the way?
A: I think there are four accomplishments worth noting. First, the collaboration between SCF, Knik Tribal Council and Chickaloon Village Traditional Council. Second, the approval to participate in the IHS Joint Venture Construction Program. Third, the ability to obtain low-cost financing from USDA and Wells Fargo. Fourth, a design-build team that designed and constructed a beautiful facility that we can be proud to receive our care in. Without all of these, this project could not have occurred.

FWWI, continued from page 1

Tudor Road, which has provided an environment for deep and rich healing. Over the last four years in this location, it has been a privilege to come alongside the community and beautify the properties. SCF is continuing to work through the channels set out by the Municipality to obtain approval for other improvements, which would be phased in over time.

The first phase would increase the number of beds in the existing participant lodging areas from 48 to 60, increase the number of staff in the existing office from 11 to 21, replace an existing building with 16 parking spaces, and build a training center that would truly blend into the serene beauty surrounding the purchased properties. The next phase would include additional dorm space. The need is great in our state for FWWI’s work. But, rather than increasing trainings to two times per month to meet the demand, FWWI aims to increase capacity through the addition of this training center and dorm lodging, which would allow for fewer trainings per year.

Neighbors have recently contacted SCF with questions about the project, including questions about vehicle and pedestrian traffic in the neighborhood. Fortunately, there is far less vehicular traffic since SCF purchased and improved these properties. FWWI participants park their vehicles off-site and are shuttled to the training center by van. Buildings that used to be residential apartments were used just three times annually as participant dormitories over the last several years. Before SCF purchased these properties, the 75+ residents living there were driving their vehicles and walking on these roads every day.

With improved and renovated properties, reduced traffic and a reduced crime rate, FWWI has had a positive effect on the neighborhood over the last four years. The overall goal of FWWI is to end the cycle of abuse. Ultimately, those who attend the trainings experience personal growth that translates into healthier relationships at home, at work and throughout our communities and neighborhoods. As a result, FWWI has had a significant impact in the lives of many Alaskans.

If you have any questions regarding the proposed expansion, please contact SCF Vice President of Resource and Development/Chief of Staff Dr. Kevin Gottlieb at (907) 729-4964. If you have questions about FWWI, please contact FWWI Clinical Director Bobbi Oaten at (907) 729-5442 or at boutten@scfc.cc.

FWWI is making great strides to end domestic violence, child abuse and neglect in this state, and appreciates the strong support of those walking this journey of wellness with us.