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Venetie's new Myra Roberts Health Clinic honors the legacy of the village midwife

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It's 40 below in Venetie, but it's warm inside the new Myra Roberts Health Clinic. After 10 months of construction efforts, the community of Venetie welcomed the opening of the new clinic last week. "We are so excited, we could not wait to move in," said Margo Simple, community health practitioner in Venetie, "it's a blessing to have a new clinic compared to the old one."

Construction was performed using local carpenters and laborers under the direction of Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Division of Environmental Health and Engineering and Venetie Tribal Administrator, Eddie Frank. "They did a great job. It's so nice to have an office to work from versus a bunch of boxes work out of", said Myra Thumma, the clinic's behavioral health aide and previous health practitioner.

Thumma noted, "Both Myra Roberts and Jessie Williams are have prepared the path for us here in the new clinic". Myra Roberts (1890-1986), was called Grandma, and as the village midwife, delivered 81 babies in the community. She had 17 children, 4 adopted children, 49 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren. Roberts inspired Jessie Williams to become the community's health aide in the 1970's and serve for 36 years. Roberts also taught many traditional harvesting methods, tanned hides and had a love of fishing on the river. Thumma mentioned she can still hear Myra Roberts saying, "Gwinzii Dakhoontii" ("take good care of yourself") to villagers.

The new 2,269 square-foot clinic replaces a much smaller log-constructed building which has served as the clinic for more than 20 years. The new clinic is equipped with fully piped water and sewer services and features two exam rooms, a dental operatory, a behavioral health office, a lab/pharmacy room, and sleeping quarters to house visiting traveling physicians, dentists and other specialists. The new facility also boasts full access to Telemedicine services and electronic health records.

Work on the clinic will continue in 2015, and includes the design and construction of an energy-efficient heat recovery system, which is projected to save the community money. "The heat recovery system is expected to provide more than 90 percent of the heat needed for the new clinic," said Craig Wood, ANTHC Health Facility Project Manager. "That will save the community a lot of money in operating costs."

The village council partnered with ANTHC, the Denali Commission, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Indian Health Service, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority to complete the facility.

About the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium is a not-for-profit Tribal health organization managed by Alaska Native Tribal governments and their regional health organizations. ANTHC provides statewide services in specialty medical care; construction of water, sanitation and health facilities; community health and research; telehealth and information technology. For more information, please visit www.anthc.org.

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