

Association of Village Council Presidents Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AVCP Annual Convention Address

Vivian Korthuis, CEO

Introduction

My name is Vivian Korthuis. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer for the Association of Village Council Presidents. Welcome tribes, tribal members, delegates, executive board, guests and staff to the 57th AVCP Annual Convention.

This is the second virtual convention for AVCP in a row. The theme for this year's annual convention is "We will survive this pandemic, with hope and resiliency."

My message this year will be a little different. Every year I try and summarize AVCP's accomplishments in the past year and provide encouragement for the next year. This time, I'd like to share 5 of the lessons that I have learned about AVCP and how important our organization is to the region.

Lesson 1: *Make decisions and keep moving forward*

This past summer, on June 1st I returned to my office after 65 weeks of remote work at home during the first year of the pandemic. Like many of you, I was at first very apprehensive to leave my house after quarantining for so long. At work, I sat at my desk and noticed that my calendar on the wall still showed March 2020. The first thing I did in my office was to check to see if anyone else was there. It was very quiet.

I sat in my chair and just took it all in. My mind went back to the day in March of 2020 when I made the decision to send all AVCP staff to work from home. That decision was made based on the most current CDC guidelines, recommendations and guidelines from YKHC and foremost, in collaboration with the AVCP Executive Team.

The lesson I learned during this time is that making decisions is not easy. But we continue to make decisions every day. These decisions can be very heavy. Living through Covid is not easy. It's not easy for all of us at any level-at home, at work, at school and in every one of our villages. The important thing is that we make those decisions to protect people, to protect families, to protect communities and to protect our region.

Lesson 2: *The importance of working together and showing recognition*

We know that we cannot do anything by ourselves, especially under the crisis conditions we have experienced in the past year and a half in our region. AVCP has worked with our sister organization YKHC since the beginning of the pandemic. We have relied on the medical experts and government agencies not only to get the most current information out to our employees, but to help facilitate the many, many questions our staff had.

Dr. Hodges, YKHC Chief of Staff, has been very gracious and has made herself available to call into our weekly staff meetings, our COVID Task Force meetings and has met with the Executive Team numerous times. We are very happy she has accepted the invitation to be this year's AVCP Annual Convention Keynote Speaker.

In addition, we are very happy that the AVCP Executive Board has passed and forwarded to the annual convention a resolution recognizing the work of the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation. I also want to thank the Tribes directly, for recognizing and thanking YKHC for its critical role in our region to address the pandemic. Thank you to Dr. Hodges and all of YKHC for doing the incredible work you have done for all of us.

Lesson 3: *Don't Stop. Keep Going.*

A couple weeks ago I was approached by an Elder who spoke to me while I was waiting for an appointment at the hospital. We spoke just a couple minutes, but what he said is what I needed to hear. He told me that the work AVCP is doing in our region is on the right track and is appreciated. He said, "Don't stop. Keep going." I wanted to make sure that this encouragement by the Elders is shared and spread throughout our region.

Our youth, our schools, our families, our communities, our tribes, our villages, our organizations, and our region can't stop. We need to keep going.

Lesson 4: *This will pass*

On September 20th, the Anchorage Daily News reported over 2,000 new cases of Covid over the weekend and five new deaths. COVID-19 has touched every village within our region, and we have lost family and friends. We need to remain diligent – get the vaccine, wear masks, wash your hands and stay home if you are sick. Dr. Hodges has told the AVCP staff many, many times that the way out of Covid is to get vaccinated.

I've been on countless of virtual meetings about Covid-19 since the pandemic started over a year and a half ago. Last year, AVCP pivoted our services to operate under the pandemic, and we have learned to protect our employees but continue to provide the services that our region needs. We have put in place every protection recommended by experts and encourage everyone to get the vaccine and follow guidelines or mandates in every one of our communities. I know it's very hard to hear this now, but in the long run, there will be a time when the pandemic is not with us. This will pass. Our goal is to get through Covid, standing up.

Lesson 5: *Protect our Way of Life*

There are many layers of challenges in our region right now. Despite the public safety crisis, the pandemic and now the salmon disaster, we need to keep moving forward.

Recently, I was asked “What is the plan for the salmon disaster?” At the time, I could not answer the question. But I knew that we had to use the process of improvement at AVCP to get the answer and create a strategy with input from everyone.

AVCP created a strategy to address the decline and collapse of the salmon fisheries with input from staff, administration, and executive board. It can be found on our webpage and is published in local newspapers. We shared it at our quarterly tribal teleconference meeting recently and now ask our tribes to provide input by participating in upcoming meetings and efforts to gather information.

Closing

I have said many times over the past 18 months that “We need to lean into the pandemic and come out the other end standing up.”

This is still my message. In March of 2020, I asked staff to lean into this crisis, and to come out the other side standing up. That is what we are doing at AVCP. We will continue to look to the horizon. We will use what we have learned and continue to make improvements no matter what challenges we face.

In closing, I would like to recognize and thank all the AVCP staff for all the hard work and innovation that goes on in order to continue to provide services to our Families, Villages, Tribes and to our whole Region.

We will make decisions and keep moving forward.

We will continue to partner and work together.

We won't stop and will keep going.

We know this will pass.

We will protect Our Way of Life.

Thank you. Quyana.

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For additional information, please contact AVCP Communications Director, Gage Hoffman at 907-543-7308 or email at ghoffman@avcp.org

AVCP is a regional nonprofit tribal consortium comprised of the 56 federally recognized tribes of the YK Delta. The geographic boundaries of AVCP extend from the Yukon River Village of Russian Mission downstream to the Bering Sea coast, north up through Kotlik and south along the coastline to Platinum and then extending up the Kuskokwim River to Stony River, including Lime Village on the Stony River tributary. The area encompasses approximately 6.5 million acres, or 55,000 square miles, in Western Alaska.