

# *31<sup>st</sup> Annual* **NADF AWARDS**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **Celebrating Aboriginal Prosperity - NADF Announces Winners for the 31st Annual NADF Awards**

**Thunder Bay, Ontario, Friday, March 24, 2023:** NADF and Presenting Sponsor, Bearskin Airlines – A Division of Perimeter Aviation LP presented the 31st Annual NADF Awards Gala at the Valhalla Hotel & Conference Centre. Last held in-person in 2019, 220 guests attended a sold-out event to celebrate six (6) award recipients for excellence in business and leadership, and were entertained by stand-up comedian, writer, actor Paul Rabliauskas.

A new category was introduced this year – Excellence in Community Planning – to recognize the First Nation communities and their CCP Coordinators who have worked tirelessly in engaging their community members to develop Comprehensive Community Plans for the future of their members. Three communities were recognized for their work in community planning.

NADF is pleased to welcome back Bearskin Airlines – A Division of Perimeter Aviation LP, who has proudly sponsored the annual awards since the inaugural event in 1991.

*“We are honoured to be a part of the NADF Awards. They are a testament to the incredible achievements of Indigenous businesses and individuals who are making a difference and inspiring future entrepreneurs in Northern Ontario. We are proud to be a part of this vibrant and dynamic region. We look forward to continuing to serve our customers and support Northern Ontario’s economic growth.” – Joey Petrisor, CEO & President, Perimeter Aviation*

#### **PARTNERSHIP OF THE YEAR**

##### **MINODAHMUN DEVELOPMENT LP**

##### **Award Sponsor: Ontario Power Generation**

In 2016, Animbiigoo Zaagi’igan Anishinaabek, Aroland First Nation and Ginoogaming First Nation formed a partnership to collectively negotiate an impact benefit agreement with Greenstone Gold Mines. Through this process the First Nations experienced the advantages of cooperation and working in partnership to advance the interests of the Nations and the regional economy.

The unified approach of the First Nations led to the formation of Minodahmun Development LP to jointly manage business opportunities and advance employment preparedness related to mining and other industrial projects. The partnership has over 40 active joint venture agreements in construction, mining, engineering and oil and gas sectors; 280 members have participated in training programs and of these, they have assisted 106 in securing employment. The partnership has invested over \$6 million in local training initiatives since 2020 and has acquired lands set asides to develop a 11-hectare commercial plaza and 3-hectare industrial plaza.

The three First Nations are equal owners and jointly manage and share in the profits of Minodahmun. The profits are used to advance community infrastructure and social programs. The partnership has no debt and a strong cashflow and good liquidity. Earning \$7.8 million in revenue in 2021-2022 and are projecting stronger growth in 2022-2023.

## **STARTUP BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

### **HEART/SOUL CO., MICHELLE ELLIOT**

**Award Sponsor: Neegani Investment Management Inc.**

Michelle is a member of the Fort William First Nation and resides in the community. Heart/Soul Company was created on a passion for a mother's self-care that evolved into sharing her products with others. Being hyper-sensitive to fragrance, Michelle began researching candle making. She wanted a product that had the ability to be toxin, paraben phalate free, and share her products with others through a connection of scents that are nostalgic to many aspects of her customers lives. Her intention was never to sale her products, but after she began gifting them to others, she was encouraged to start her business.

Heart/Soul Company is a small family business, with each member carrying a role in all aspects of the business. Launched to the public in 2021, the business has received tremendous support with a rapid expansion and increased demand.

Michelle is the perfect example of the entrepreneurial spirit. She is not only a successful business owner, but she is an inspiration to her daughter and other Indigenous entrepreneurs what want to follow their dreams.

## **YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR**

### **COREY ANDERSON, INGAGED CREATIVE PRODUCTIONS INC.**

**Award Sponsor: TD**

Corey is a member of Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek and leads the Ingaged Creative Productions.

Established in late 2109, Ingaged Creative Productions was faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. Under Corey's leadership and guidance, he, and his team were successful in pivoting to a new adaptive service model that helped the firm overcome the pandemic in one the most heavily impacted industries.

Four years in business, and Ingaged Creative Productions has earned a reputation as a one of the region's leading full-service marketing firms. They have engaged with more than 120 clients and 100 events and have successfully proven their ability and commitment to providing creative, culturally conscious multi-media content, strategies, and project and event management services.

Each of these successes has allowed Ingaged Creative Productions to expand their service offerings to deliver better, more complex projects, campaigns, events, and produce new products more effectively.

Since inception, Ingaged Creative Productions has invested over \$750,000 into the regional First Nations economy through their work with new and established Indigenous Artists and small Indigenous businesses.

## **SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

### **SISTER BEAR DESIGNS, KATHLEEN SAWDO, VALERIE SAWDO, AND MALINDA STAAL**

#### **Award Sponsor: BDC**

Founded by Kathleen, a member of Lac Des Mille Lacs First Nation, Sister Bear Designs is a healing journey for three sisters to honor their family and community's knowledge, strength, resilience, and determination to carry on traditional Anishinaabe teachings through creating.

When Kathleen found herself out of work and unable to make ends meet, she knew something had to change. Kathleen attended a program for Indigenous women looking to start their own crafting business. Kathleen called her sisters and within a matter of days, Sister Bear Designs was formed.

The intent of Sister Bear Designs has been to ensure traditional and ancestral knowledge is kept alive and passed on to the next generation. Sister Bear Designs now includes three generations of family artists and offers a carefully curated collection of Indigenous foods, gifts, and clothing.

Kathleen has an unwavering dedication to the advancement and empowerment of Indigenous women and is a leader in breaking trails and creating safer places for Indigenous People in Thunder Bay.

## **BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARD**

### **Thawikayhigan LP (TKG Group)**

#### **Award Sponsor: Bearskin Airlines – A Division of Perimeter Aviation LP**

Thawikayhigan LP (TKG Group) is 100% owned by six First Nations and was established in 2018 to secure contract work with the Watay Power Project. TKG Group is in the business of securing subcontracts from the Watay Power Project and their focus is on the procurement and logistics of the goods and services for their owner First Nations.

Since inception, TKG Group has been successful in establishing itself as a general contractor and securing a significant amount of contract work with Valard Construction LP. To secure these contracts, TKG Group searched for and established alliances with reputable companies, including Indigenous companies. Three new limited partnerships and two joint ventures were created with business partners to work with TKG Group on multiple projects. An additional eight multi-year contracts being successfully negotiated with goods and services providers, and supply contracts with twenty different suppliers.

TKG Group has been successful in using their business relationships to generate significant revenues, from a negative balance in 2019 to \$14.4 Million in 2022.

TKG Group has several new business ventures planned, such as the recent announcement of the acquisition of Oshtugan Computers in December 2022.

## **EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP**

### **CORY J. MEEKIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KEEWAYTINOOK OKIMAKANAK**

#### **Award Sponsor: Hydro One**

Cory is a proud member of Deer Lake First Nation and grew up on the land learning from his family and community members about the traditional values and practices of life. It is these connections that instilled in Cory the importance of revitalizing the Aboriginal culture, language, and traditions, and why he has re-learned to speak, read, and write in his Oji-Cree language.

Cory began perfecting his servant leadership skills at the age of twenty-one when he became involved with his community's band council. Since then, Cory has served his community as a Councilor and a Deputy Chief, and has also served as a Supervisor at Tikanagan Child Family Services.

Cory's leadership skills didn't go unnoticed. In June 2022, with the encouragement of the Keewaytinook Okimakanak member Chiefs, Cory accepted the appointment of Chief Executive Director of Keewaytinook Okimakanak, a non-political Chiefs Council representing six First Nation communities in the Far North.

A natural born leader, with an open-door policy, Cory has successfully applied his knowledge of community needs and frontline work to his role as KO's Chief Executive Director. Under the direction of the KO Chiefs, and under Cory's leadership, KO has been successful in embarking on a number of key

community and economic development projects, including the Wataynikaneyap Transmission Project, various infrastructure projects, and family and welfare services.

Throughout all his endeavors, Cory has successfully demonstrated that his primary focus is revitalizing the Aboriginal culture, and the protecting, conserving, and ensuring the sustainable use of the lands and resources for future generations.

## **EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY PLANNING**

**Presented by: Melissa Courte, Senior Strategic Initiatives Officer, Indigenous Services Canada**

This year, for the first time, three (3) First Nations were recognized for their work in tirelessly in engaging their community members to develop Comprehensive Community Plans for the future of their members.

### **Mitaanjigamiing First Nation**

**Accepted by: Chris Henderson, CCP Coordinator**

Mitaanjigamiing has been a quiet leader in the CCP field for years, making steady progress on community development. They began their community planning process in 2012 with a 3-year strategic plan. By 2015, their planning efforts grew, with community engagement events identifying over 300 actions. In 2016, funding allowed them to begin a focussed CCP process; working with both on- and off- reserve members to set a Vision, Objectives, and exploring the ideas and challenges brought forward by the community.

After years of review, the plan was finalized in 2019 and Mitaanjigaming Chief and Council and staff immediately moved to begin implementing it. The last 3 years have been focussed on realizing the Goals set out in the Plan, updating the CCP as initiatives were completed, and setting new Goals. Projects completed from the CCP have included new docks, houses, buildings, road improvements, annual community events, and settling land claims. Looking forward, Mitaanjigamiing will continue work on the CCP with solar panels, more housing, a daycare, roundhouse improvements, economic development projects, youth programming and more.

### **MOOSE CREE FIRST NATION**

**Accepted by: Linda Trudeau, former CCP Coordinator**

The Moose Cree CCP is a testament to the determination of FN staff and community members who want to see positive change for their community. Their process began in 2018 with the hiring of a brand new CCP Coordinator. Linda then led 3 years of deep community engagement; a total of 57 community events involving more than 1000 community members in Moose Factory and communities across northern Ontario. During the events, the process covered 8 areas of community, exploring what's going on now and what members want to see going forward. The process also brought staff to the table, to identify strategic, actionable projects to make the CCP Vision a reality.

The Moose Cree CCP is currently awaiting final approval by Chief and Council, but has the full support of the membership, who put years of efforts into the Plan.

## **WEBEQUIE FIRST NATION**

### **Accepted by: Gordon Wabasse**

Webequie's planning truly began before the signing of Treaty, when they received the 3- Tier structure from their Elders. This structure sets the framework for all planning going forward and was the basis of the CCP. Modern planning processes began with Days of Action in 2010 and 2015, during which members began generating lists of action ideas, identifying their aspirations for the future. CCP officially started in 2015 with focussed community engagement events, involving youth, Elders, staff, and all members. Events to gather, sort, and review information were held in English and Oji Cree, on- and off reserve, online, and on the land. Their Draft Plan was finalized in late 2022, and is currently in front of membership, for the final stages of review before endorsing their CCP. Chief and Council aim to endorse the plan by BCR later this spring, and the Plan will be foundational as Webequie looks forward to future partnerships, development, and positive community change.

*Proceeds from this year's event will support the Dennis Franklin Cromarty Highschool, a high school for First Nation students located in Thunder Bay, ON. Established in 2000, and administered by the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council, the high school delivers education and extra-curricular activities to students from twenty (20) First Nation communities in Northwestern Ontario, and the NADF Sponsorship Fund, a fund established by NADF to provide financial support to Indigenous People, groups, organizations within our service area for activities and initiatives that promote education, healthy living, and cultural learning.*

*To date, the annual NADF Awards has generated over \$677,000 in proceeds for various causes.*

## **ABOUT NADF**

*Incorporated in 1984, NADF is a not-for-profit Aboriginal Financial Institution promoting and supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurs, businesses, and economic development within the boundaries of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Robinson-Superior 1850 and Treaty 3 territories. NADF delivers financing, business support, community planning, workshops, and comprehensive community planning services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, wholly-owned and majority-owned businesses (on and off-reserve), and First Nation communities*

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