

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Friday, October 23, 2026

WINNERS ANNOUNCED FOR THE 34th ANNUAL NADF AWARDS

www.nadfawards.com

Thunder Bay, ON: The Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund (NADF), together with Perimeter Aviation, proudly celebrated Indigenous entrepreneurship and leadership at the 34th Annual NADF Awards on Thursday, October 22, 2026.

Held at the Delta Hotels Thunder Bay, the gala welcomed more than 200 guests for an evening dedicated to honouring Indigenous business success across Northern Ontario.

Since 1991, the NADF Awards have recognized outstanding achievements that contribute to strong economies and thriving communities. This year, six exceptional recipients were added to that legacy, bringing the total number of award honourees to 211 over 34 years.

Awards were presented in six categories:

- Partnership
- Startup Business
- Young Entrepreneur
- Small Business
- Excellence in Leadership
- Business Excellence

Patrick Cheechoo led the evening as Master of Ceremonies, guiding the celebration with his signature humour and warm presence. The evening also featured a special performance by Indigenous comedian Ron Kanutski, adding a fun and entertaining moment to the program. Guests enjoyed a three-course dinner, networking, and powerful stories of perseverance, vision, and community impact.

Proceeds from the 34th Annual NADF Awards support the NADF Community Care Fund and the NADF Mikinaak Bursary Fund for Indigenous Students. The NADF Community Care Fund provides financial support for cultural, wellness, and community-based events that celebrate Indigenous culture and promote healthy living. The Mikinaak Bursary helps Indigenous students pursue post-secondary education by easing financial barriers and investing in the next generation of leaders. Launched in April 2025, the Mikinaak Bursary supported six Indigenous students in its inaugural year.

For 34 years, the NADF Awards have proudly recognized the spirit of leadership and vision that fuels Indigenous entrepreneurs, uplifting communities, empowering future leaders, and building a prosperous future for Northern Ontario.

34th ANNUAL NADF AWARD RECIPIENTS

PARTNERSHIP OF THE YEAR

**Sponsored by: Ontario Power Generation
The HT Group, Thunder Bay, ON**

The HT Group is a 100% First Nation-owned group of companies headquartered in Thunder Bay, Ontario.



Left to right: Erin Moore, Vice-President of Business Development, HT Group; Luke Reynolds, CEO, HT Group; and Mike Woodcock, Director of Operations, OPG.

The HT Group has grown through collaboration among First Nations and Indigenous partners, with businesses that support travel, logistics, real estate, hospitality, and community-focused development across Northwestern Ontario.

Its operations include Happy Time Tours & Travel, Carrick Express, Happy Time Real Estate Holdings, and the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel & Conference Centre, alongside a growing portfolio of community-aligned ventures.

Built on shared vision and long-term commitment, The HT Group demonstrates how partnerships can create sustainable business growth, meaningful employment, and stronger economic foundations for Indigenous communities.

Through its growth in travel, logistics, property, and hospitality, The HT Group continues to show the strength that comes from Nations working together.

STARTUP BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: Neegani Investment Management Inc.

Savion Nakogee, Fort Albany First Nation

Co-Founder and CEO, Wabusk Data Solutions

Savion Nakogee is a member of Fort Albany First Nation, with paternal connections to Moose Cree First Nation and maternal connections to Moccreebec Eeyoud. He is an Indigenous technology professional, community educator, and Co-Founder and CEO of Wabusk Data Solutions.

Wabusk Data Solutions is an Indigenous-owned data governance, privacy, and cybersecurity consulting business founded in 2025. The business works with Indigenous communities and partner organizations to support culturally respectful approaches to data, privacy, security, and technology.

Savion's path into technology grew from a desire to serve his community in a different way. After beginning as an entry-level computer technician, he continued to build his skills through self-directed learning, professional certifications, and hands-on experience in computer systems, programming, cybersecurity, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty. In its early years, Wabusk Data Solutions has developed training and assessment tools to help organizations better understand Indigenous Data Sovereignty, while also securing projects with the First Nations Technology Council and The Nature Conservancy. Savion has also shared this work through conferences, community presentations, and partnerships focused on digital safety and responsible technology use.



Left to right: Chelsea Nakogee, Co-founder of Wabusk Data Solutions; Savion Nakogee, CEO of Wabusk Data Solutions

Through Wabusk, Savion is helping communities strengthen their ability to protect their own information and make informed decisions about their digital futures.

His work reflects a thoughtful commitment to community care, learning, and accountable partnerships.

YOUNG ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: TD

Delores Wesley, Fort Albany First Nation

Owner, Wesley's Take Out

Delores Wesley began her business journey with a kitchen mixer, selling birthday cakes from her parents' kitchen. After moving home to Fort Albany and continuing her education in Culinary Arts and Business Accounting, she returned to selling cakes and food from home while raising her children.

In 2021, Delores and her family took a major step by privately financing the purchase of Wesley's Take Out, a restaurant and convenience store. What began as a significant risk has grown through hard work, sacrifice, and reinvestment into a much stronger operation.



Left to Right: William Wesley; Delores Wesley, Owner of Wesley's Take Out.

Her entrepreneurial journey has since expanded to include property investment, a short-term rental, and a heavy equipment business with equipment working on projects in her community.

Through each step, Delores has focused on creating stability for her family, building new sources of income, and contributing to local development.

Delores' story is also one of personal transformation. She has spoken openly about choosing sobriety, continuing her healing journey, and managing serious health challenges while building her businesses.

Her story reminds young people that where you begin does not determine where you can go.

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: Hydro One

Marie Burke-Lecours, Moosonee, ON

Owner, Necessities

Marie Burke-Lecours is originally from Fort Severn, Ontario, and now calls Moosonee home, where she has built her life, raised her family, and become part of the community.



Left to right: Rob Lecours; Marie Burke Lecours, Owner of Necessities

In August 2020, Marie and her husband, Rob, became the owners of Necessities, a family-run convenience store that had been serving the community since 1991. What began as a long-held dream of owning a business became a new chapter built on faith, hard work, and determination.

Today, Necessities offers confectionery, snacks, healthier options, soft serve ice cream, in-house subs, daily lunch specials, catering, pizza, evening orders, and its popular in-house fried chicken, Mom's Chicken.

Marie is a hands-on owner who can often be found serving customers, stocking shelves, cooking, cleaning, or doing whatever needs to be done.

Over the past year, Marie has continued to grow her entrepreneurial work through Lil' Necessities at the local arena, where a portion of revenue supports children's programs, and by opening Bare Necessities Massage & Spa. Through Necessities and her other ventures, she continues to create

services that respond to local needs.

Giving back is central to Marie's approach. Her businesses have supported food banks, churches, schools, hockey teams, community events, local families, and causes close to the community.

Marie's commitment to service, community, and practical growth reflects the spirit of Indigenous small-business excellence.

EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

Sponsored by: Doane Grant Thornton

Peter Collins, Fort William First Nation; Chief Executive Officer, Chi Mino Ozhitowin

Peter Collins is an Anishinaabe leader from Fort William First Nation with decades of experience in Indigenous governance, economic development, and community advocacy. He currently serves as Chief Executive Officer of Chi Mino Ozhitowin.

Throughout his career, Peter has focused on advancing Indigenous sovereignty, economic self-determination, and long-term well-being for First Nations in Northwestern Ontario.

His leadership includes serving 10 terms as Chief of Fort William First Nation after first being elected to Council in 1986, while continuing to serve on Council today.

As CEO of Chi Mino Ozhitowin, Peter guides work connected to major infrastructure development, including the Waasigan Transmission Line Project. The organization supports First Nations participation through employment, capacity training, environmental stewardship, procurement, and partnerships with industry, government, and educational institutions.

Peter's accomplishments include helping lead Fort William First Nation through three historic settlement agreements, supporting First Nations equity participation in major transmission developments, and advancing training initiatives that help community members gain industry-recognized skills.

His leadership has also been recognized through the 2024 Anishinabek Nation Lifetime Achievement Award and the 2026 Confederation College Community Partner of the Year Award.



Left to right: Team at Chi Mino Ozhitoowin: Ginger Randle; Sherry Pelletier; Angela Collins; Peter Collins, CEO; Craig Hardy; Wendy Roberts; Chief Michele Solomon; Kristy Boucher.

Peter Collins' career reflects sustained leadership in governance, economic development, infrastructure, training, and community advocacy.

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

Sponsored by: Perimeter Aviation

ThawiKayhiGan Group (TKG Group)

ThawiKayhiGan Group, also known as TKG Group, is a 100% First Nation-owned business development group established in November 2018. It is owned equally by six shareholder First Nations.



Left to right: Carlos Castillo, Vice-President, Community and Government Affairs, Perimeter Aviation; Jonathon Mamakwa, President of Thawikayhigan Group

Since its early work supporting the Wataynikaneyap Power Project, TKG has grown through contracting, camp services, logistics, supply, retail, health services, training, and new fuel and procurement initiatives.

TKG's growth includes partnerships with organizations such as Valard Construction LP, Dexterra, Moncrief Construction, and Centerfire LP, helping build capacity while keeping the focus on jobs, training, and long-term benefits for its shareholder communities.

Recent milestones include the 2023 acquisition of Oshtugon Computers Inc. and the development of the Pipestone Fuels and Supplies LP fuel depot in Pickle Lake, which is intended to support bulk fuel delivery and help reduce costs for northern communities.

Grounded in community ownership, reinvestment, and practical business growth, TKG Group continues to build opportunities led by and for First Nations.



Left to right: 2026 NADF Award recipients — Jonathon Mamakwa; Luke Reynolds; Marie Burke Lecours; Peter Collins; Delores Wesley; Savion Nakogee.

*“Across Northern Ontario, Indigenous entrepreneurs are turning bold ideas into lasting opportunities. Their leadership creates jobs, strengthens communities, and opens new paths for the next generation. We are proud to recognize this year’s recipients and celebrate the vision, resilience, and community commitment behind their achievements.” – **Brian Davey, CEO, NADF***

*“Strong businesses have an impact that extends beyond their own success. They create opportunities, build local capacity, and contribute to stronger communities. The Indigenous entrepreneurs and business leaders recognized through the NADF Awards are demonstrating what’s possible when vision, determination, and a connection to community come together. We’re proud to celebrate what they are building across Northern Ontario.” – **Joey Petrisor, President & CEO, Perimeter Aviation***

About NADF

Incorporated in 1984, the Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund (NADF) is a not-for-profit Indigenous Financial Institution dedicated to advancing Indigenous prosperity across Northern Ontario. NADF provides a range of financing solutions, including loans and grants, along with business advisory support to help entrepreneurs start, grow, and scale their businesses. Serving First Nation

communities

and Indigenous entrepreneurs throughout Treaty 9, Treaty 5 (Ontario), Treaty 3, and the Robinson-Superior 1850 territories, NADF's work strengthens local economies, creates opportunities, and supports long-term community well-being.

About Perimeter Aviation

Established in 1960, Perimeter Aviation, alongside its division Bearskin Airlines, is one of Canada's largest regional air carriers. Perimeter Aviation provides scheduled passenger flights, custom chartered flights, cargo shipping, and emergency air ambulance services throughout Manitoba and Ontario. With a fleet of over 40 aircraft and operating an Approved Aircraft Maintenance Organization, Perimeter Aviation is proud to serve an extensive network of over 25 destinations providing safe, reliable, and efficient air travel solutions for all.

For more information about the awards, contact: Brain Davey

Chief Executive Officer,
Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund;
Phone: 807-623-5397
Email: bdavey@nadf.org

