

Presented By



Bearskin Airlines

A DIVISION OF PERIMETER AVIATION



CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS PROSPERITY

October 23, 2025 | Thunder Bay, Ontario | Delta Hotels by Marriott

SOUVENIR PROGRAM BOOKLET

WWW.NADFAWARDS.COM



Celebrating **TRAILBLAZERS**

At Perimeter Aviation, we believe in the strength, resilience, and economic development of Indigenous businesses and Nations.

We are proud to support the NADF Awards and recognize the achievements of the nominees and winners. Your hard work, passion, and dedication is inspiring. Congratulations!

CONNECTING HORIZONS

PERIMETER
AVIATION

 **Bearskin**
Airlines



Group photo of Award Winners at the 33rd Annual NADF Awards.
Hosted by Delta Hotels Thunder Bay | October 23, 2025

Thunder Bay, ON: The Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund (NADF), together with Bearskin Airlines – A Division of Perimeter Aviation, proudly celebrated Indigenous entrepreneurship and leadership at the 33rd Annual NADF Awards on Thursday, October 23, 2025.

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 205 over 33 years.

Awards were presented in six categories:

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



Thank you! NADF extends our gratitude to the **Delta Hotels Thunder Bay by Marriott** for their exceptional hospitality in hosting the **33rd Annual NADF Awards**. Your support made this celebration unforgettable!

Master of Ceremonies **Brent Edwards**



A proud member of Fort Albany First Nation, Brent “Mooselegs” Edwards has deep roots in Thunder Bay, where he grew up and now raises his family. He earned an Ontario Teacher’s Diploma from Nipissing University, a Business Administration diploma from CDI College, and a Business Management Certificate from Northern College.

For several years, Brent was balancing a full-time career with his passion for emceeing and workshop facilitation. He recently took a bold leap to pursue his passion and Mooselegs2 became a full-time business venture. That courageous move has led to tremendous success, and he is now in high demand across the region for his engaging and innovative approach.

Brent was recognized for his talent in 2013 when he was awarded the NADF Youth Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and NADF is thrilled to welcome Brent back to stage to bring his award-winning enthusiasm and creativity, ensuring a lively, interactive, and unforgettable experience for our guests.

Stand-up Comedian, Actor, Writer, TV & Radio Performer

Howie Miller



Howie Miller is a veteran of the most respected stages in the comedy world. He has been a featured performer at all of Canada's major comedy festivals, including the internationally renowned Montreal Just for Laughs Festival, the Winnipeg Comedy Festival, and the Halifax Comedy Festival.

His television career is equally impressive, with significant credits in both Canada and the United States. He made a major splash in the U.S. market with his feature performance in the groundbreaking Showtime special, *The Indian Comedy Slam, No Reservations Needed*. This program was a landmark event, celebrated as the first all-Native stand-up comedy show in American television history. In Canada, he has been a fixture on television for years. He starred in his own half-hour special, *Comedy Now!*, on The Comedy Network and has made numerous appearances on CBC specials, including the *Alberta Comedy Spectacular* and *Winnipeg Comedy Festival: Welcome to Turtle Island 1 & 2*.

Beyond stand-up specials, Miller showcased his acting and writing talents as a lead in the hit sketch comedy show *Caution: May Contain Nuts*, which aired for five seasons on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). He is also a familiar voice to radio listeners through his appearances on CBC's popular and witty debate program, *The Debaters*. Complementing his broadcast work, he has toured extensively, notably as a key member of the acclaimed comedy troupe *Pow Wow Comedy Jam*, which earned rave reviews across the United States.



CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS PROSPERITY

Congratulations to Our Winners!

NADF sends out a huge congratulations to this year's award recipients! Your hard work, creativity, and dedication truly shine. You've shown what's possible through perseverance and passion — inspiring others and making a real difference for your families, communities, and Northern Ontario's economy.

As we look back on this year's celebrations, we're proud to recognize the incredible impact you've made in driving growth and opportunity across the region. Your stories remind us just how strong and visionary Indigenous business is in Northern Ontario. A big thank-you as well to everyone who took the time to nominate — your efforts helped shine a light on these amazing achievements.

We'd also like to share our deepest thanks to our sponsors. Your support and generosity made this event possible and helped us celebrate excellence, innovation, and leadership within our communities.

Together, we're building brighter futures and creating a legacy of success and opportunity.

Thank You Nominators!

We recognize the important role nominators play in the success of the annual awards gala. By submitting your nominations, you help to ensure that the remarkable achievements of individuals and businesses within our communities are seen and celebrated. Each nomination highlights a story of success and impact, and this year's award recipients represent the incredible accomplishments being recognized at this event.

Thank you to all who contributed. Your efforts are essential to making this celebration of excellence possible and showcasing the positive change happening across our communities.

Award Categories

Young Entrepreneur of the Year

This award recognizes an Indigenous youth (Status, Inuit, or Métis) under the age of 39, who has paved a space for themselves through their hard work and dedication to their business. This entrepreneur shows us why you should never give up on your goals and is an inspiration for others. The nominee must be 39 years and younger to be nominated in this award category.

Excellence in Leadership

This award will recognize an individual who has demonstrated excellence in leadership involving people, events, programs, projects, and/or teams. Passionate and creative, they take the initiative and think outside the box when running their business or managing their team. Through their strong leadership skills, and innovative management strategies, this leader will be an inspiration for all leaders to follow. Leaders of non-profits are eligible to be nominated in this award category.

Partnership of the Year

This award recognizes two or more individuals or entities who have formed a partnership built on mutual respect and common goals, and who have demonstrated innovation, leadership, thoughtful planning, and growth potential. These partners best exemplify the true meaning of partnership. Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners are eligible provided the Indigenous partner is the majority partner (minimum 51%).

Startup Business of the Year

This award recognizes a startup business that has shown significant promise through their growth since starting their business. Businesses operating for less than 2 years, but for more than 10 months, are eligible to be nominated in this award category.

Business Excellence Award

This award will recognize overall achievements and excellence in company growth including sales, profitability, employment creation, and innovation.

Small Business of the Year

This award recognizes a small business that has demonstrated innovation, leadership, thoughtful planning, and growth potential.

Building *Ontario's* *future* together.

OPG is committed to building and growing long-term, mutually beneficial working relationships with Indigenous communities near our current and future operations.

The road map set out in our *Reconciliation Action Plan* outlines our goals to grow the company's economic impact for Indigenous communities and businesses by \$1 billion by 2031 through Indigenous procurement and equity partnerships with our Indigenous partners, funding for Indigenous community initiatives, and our *Indigenous Opportunities Network (ION)*.



Learn more



Winner Profile

Award Sponsored By

ONTARIOPOWER
GENERATION

Partnership of the Year

Ryan Besiallon & Diane Pearson, Clean Cut Contracting



L to R: Brian Dietrich, VP Western Region | Ontario Power Generation & Ryan Besiallon, Mississauga First Nation & Diane Pearson, Partners, Clean Cut Contracting, Matheson, ON

When Ryan Besiallon and Diane Pearson founded Clean Cut Contracting in August 2023, they didn't just start a business, they built a partnership defined by trust, balance, and shared vision.

What began as two parents connecting through their children quickly evolved into a powerful collaboration rooted in respect and complementary skills. Ryan, with his extensive construction experience and disciplined work ethic, leads field operations. Diane, with her keen financial acumen and organizational expertise, manages budgeting, administration, and strategic planning. Together, they form the backbone of a business that lives up to its name: clean, precise, and professional.





In just over two years, Clean Cut Contracting has become one of Northern Ontario's most promising new construction firms. Their project roster reads like that of a seasoned company, including the new community centre in Iroquois Falls and a 15,000 sq. ft. gas station in Hearst. These large-scale projects are testaments to the confidence clients have in their workmanship, reliability, and ability to deliver safely and efficiently.

But beyond their work sites, Diane and Ryan are deeply invested in their communities. They regularly support local initiatives, sponsor youth sports, and give back through volunteering and donating to community events and fundraisers. For them, success isn't only measured in square footage, it's measured in the positive impact they have on the people and places around them.

Their reputation for integrity and safety is second to none. They engage licensed trades and safety inspectors on every project and uphold the highest standards of workmanship. This dedication to doing things right the first time has earned them the trust of clients and partners alike.

Clean Cut Contracting's growth has been strategic and sustainable. By carefully planning their investments and hiring administrative support, Ryan and Diane have positioned their business for long-term stability. Their disciplined approach ensures that each step forward strengthens their foundation and contributes to community development.

As a 51% Indigenous-owned company, Clean Cut Contracting embodies the entrepreneurial spirit that uplifts both business and community. Ryan and Diane's partnership demonstrates how collaboration, hard work, and shared values can build not only great projects, but lasting prosperity for Northern Ontario.



At TD, we know reconciliation is multifaceted and continuous, for each of us as individuals and collectively as a Bank. That's why, we're supporting community initiatives that promote a connection to the land, enhance financial literacy, and stimulate economic development. We believe society is stronger when we work together, and we can help be a catalyst for dialogue to bring people, communities, and cultures together.

Learn more at td.com/indigenous

TD READY
COMMITMENT



Winner Profile

Award Sponsored By



Startup Business of the Year

Craig Hyatt, Owner, Rainy Lake Electrical



L to R: Terry Copenance, Sr. Business Development Manager, TD Bank | Craig Hyatt, Fort William First Nation, Owner, Rainy Lake Electrical, Fort Frances, ON



Craig Hyatt is a member of Fort William First Nation, and the founder of Rainy Lake Electrical. Born and raised in Fort Frances, Ontario, Craig's upbringing instilled in him a deep respect for nature, community, and hard work. It's these values that continue to guide both his personal life and professional journey.

Craig's path to entrepreneurship began with a natural curiosity for how things worked, from dismantling toys to building car audio systems as a teen. After working at the Fort Frances mill, Craig pursued his dream of becoming an electrician and launched Rainy Lake Electrical, a 100% Indigenous-owned business, on September 25, 2024. A one-man operation, Craig took on every role - owner, operator, and master electrician - and he is driven by a vision to build something lasting for his family and community.



The road to success wasn't without challenges. Craig describes the first year as a period of steep learning, filled with unexpected hurdles, moments of doubt, and lessons learned through persistence. Balancing every aspect of the business on his own tested his determination but also strengthened his resolve to succeed. His perseverance paid off. In its first year, Rainy Lake Electrical has secured two major contracts: a government project across six facilities in Fort Frances, Rainy River, and Pickle Lake, and a large-scale LED lighting upgrade for Rainy River First Nations, including their powwow grounds. These early achievements set the stage for growth, allowing Craig to invest in new equipment and to give back locally. Rainy Lake Electrical has donated to the Fort Frances High School Muskie Football Club and the Kitchen Creek Golf and Country Club.

Operating within Couchiching First Nation, Rainy Lake Electrical has built a strong reputation and a growing base of repeat clients, including Nanicost Ltd., Gizhewaadiziwin Health Access Centre, and McDonald's, which named Rainy Lake Electrical its official electrical contractor.

Craig Hyatt exemplifies the spirit of Indigenous entrepreneurship, and his journey reflects the power of dedication, vision, and collaboration. Rainy Lake Electrical is more than a business. It is a growing legacy rooted in culture, family, and the belief that success is meant to be shared.





Proudly Supporting the 33rd Annual NADF Awards

October 23rd, 2025

Neegani Investment Management Inc. is a fund focused on small to medium-sized enterprises, primarily in Northern Ontario but open to opportunities elsewhere if criteria are met. It provides equity or debt financing for start-ups, acquisitions, and expansions, with investments up to \$300,000 and a typical exit strategy within seven years.

Transactions may involve share or business asset purchases, often in collaboration with strategic investors, banks, Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFIs), or mainstream funds. The fund also partners with AFIs and government programs offering grants, interest rate buy-downs, and non-repayable loans.

www.neeganiinvestments.com

Winner Profile

Award Sponsored By



Young Entrepreneur of the Year

Jessica Mamakeesick, Mamakeesick Roots



L to R: Brian Davey, Managing Director, Neegani Investment Management Inc. | Jessica Mamakeesick (Robinson), Keewaywin First Nation, Owner, Mamakeesick Roots, Thunder Bay, ON



Jessica Mamakeesick is an Indigenous artisan and entrepreneur whose creative journey has blossomed into a thriving business rooted in cultural expression and community impact. A member of Keewaywin First Nation, Jessica spent her early years in Sandy Lake, a remote fly-in community in Northwestern Ontario. Today, she lives and works in Thunder Bay, where she runs Mamakeesick Roots, a business that showcases her original Indigenous artwork across a wide range of products.

Jessica's path to entrepreneurship began in 2021 with a vivid dream of painting a feather in an Indigenous style. That moment sparked a powerful connection to her heritage and inspired her to begin creating art that reflects her identity and culture.



Drawing inspiration from her father, Saul Mamakeesick, himself an Indigenous artist, Jessica chose to honour her family name through her business.

What started as painting for personal enjoyment quickly evolved into a professional pursuit. In 2023, she opened a storefront in Goods & Co. Market, a local artisan hub in Thunder Bay. As a sole proprietor, Jessica designs and produces a variety of items including prints, journals, apparel, planter pots, greeting cards, and more. Her work has gained national attention through collaborations with organizations such as Ontario University Athletics, Lakehead University, and Xspex Goggle Company. Her designs have been featured on hockey sticks for championship MVPs, university ceremonial gifts, and ski goggles sold across Canada. These achievements reflect not only her artistic talent but also her growing influence in Indigenous entrepreneurship and design.

Jessica is deeply committed to giving back. She speaks to youth about her journey, donates to community causes, and provides paint kits used in art therapy and wellness programming. Her work promotes healing, empowerment, and cultural pride.

Receiving the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award is a celebration of Jessica's courage, creativity, and leadership. Her story is a testament to the power of following one's passion and embracing cultural identity. Through Mamakeesick Roots, Jessica continues to inspire others to dream boldly, create fearlessly, and walk proudly in their own paths.



Inspiring leadership **today.** Lasting legacy **tomorrow.**

Indigenous entrepreneurs are driving economic growth and supporting financial independence through nurturing innovation, collaborative partnerships and shared prosperity.

Congratulations - 2025 category winners!

Thunder Bay
Suite 300
979 Alloy Drive
T + 1 807 345 6571

New Liskeard
17 Wellington Street
T + 1 705 647 8100

North Bay
Suite 400
222 McIntyre St W
T + 1 705 472 6500

Winner Profile

Award Sponsored By



Small Business of the Year

Pine Meadows Pet Resort



L to R: Janet Fletcher, Moose Cree First Nation, Owner, Coffee and Catering Services, Smooth Rock Falls, ON | Jen McInstosh, Sr. Manager, Doane Grant Thornton



Janet Fletcher is the founder and owner of Coffee and Catering Services, a 100% Indigenous-owned mobile catering business based in Smooth Rock Falls, Ontario. A proud member of the Moose Cree First Nation, Janet's entrepreneurial journey is rooted in resilience, community, and a lifelong passion for cooking.

Before launching her business, Janet worked in the trades as both an electrician and a welder. Her transition to catering came after a back injury during the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to continue in physically demanding roles. Drawing on her culinary skills and determination, she turned a personal setback into a thriving business opportunity.



Coffee and Catering Services serves a wide region across Northern Ontario, from Hearst to Moose Factory, offering full-service catering for events ranging from small meetings to large community gatherings of up to 500 guests. Janet is known for her hands-on approach and her ability to adapt under pressure, including successfully serving a hot meal to 150 people during a power outage.

Now in its third year, Coffee and Catering Services continues to grow through word of mouth and repeat clients who value Janet's exceptional cooking. Her menus reflect both creativity and comfort and are tailored to suit each event. Janet prioritizes hiring local staff in the communities she serves and remains deeply committed to giving back to her community. Each year, she organizes free events such as the Children's Halloween Party and the Christmas Craft Party in Smooth Rock Falls, using food as a way to bring people together to create lasting memories.

Entrepreneurship runs in Janet's family. Her parents owned several businesses, and her mother was the Businesswoman of the Year at the very first NADF Awards in 1991. Inspired by that legacy, Janet continues to build a business that reflects strength, creativity, and community care.

Janet's story is one of perseverance and purpose. She has not only built a successful business but also become a role model for Indigenous women and aspiring entrepreneurs across the region.



Building a better and brighter future



Hydro One is proud to sponsor the 33rd Annual Nishnawbe-Aski Development Fund (NADF) Awards. Our commitment is to increase Indigenous procurement spend to 5% of the company's purchases of materials and services by 2026.

We are looking to build long-standing, mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous businesses to achieve this target. Our dedicated team is eager to work with Indigenous-owned businesses, economic development corporations, and Indigenous communities.

To learn more, please email Indigenous Supply Chain Services:
IndigenousProcurement@HydroOne.com

HydroOne.com/IndigenousRelations

Winner Profile

Award Sponsored By



Excellence in Leadership

Jacob Dockstator, Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord



L to R: Simmer Anand Director, Indigenous Partnerships & Business Development, Hydro One
| Sumit Malra, Director Finance, Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord (accepting on behalf of Jacob Dockstator)



Jacob Dockstator is Mohawk and a proud member of Oneida of the Thames Nation. With a strong foundation in traditional education, Jacob pursued academic excellence, earning an undergraduate degree in Indigenous Studies from Trent University, a Juris Doctor from Osgoode Hall Law School, and an MBA from the DeGroote School of Business at McMaster University.

Since 2021, Jacob has served as the Executive Director of the Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord, a regional

development organization founded by Lac Seul, Slate Falls, Cat Lake, and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nations. Under his leadership, the Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord has secured over \$22 million in project and grant funding focused on skill development and capacity building, and \$17 million in debt financing for a 48-unit residential development in Dryden owned by the Signatory Nations.

Jacob's vision for Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord is rooted in creating barrier-free, sustainable prosperity for Northern Ontario's Indigenous communities. Through initiatives like the Sioux Lookout Mining Centre of Excellence, the Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord has delivered tuition-free training to over 250 individuals since inception, equipping them with in-demand skills and ensuring local communities benefit directly from regional resource development.

Before joining Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord, Jacob worked in private debt finance in Toronto, managing a portfolio exceeding \$200 million across Western Ontario and the Prairies. His transition to Sioux Lookout Friendship Accord was driven by a desire to align his professional work with his Indigenous roots and to lead impactful, community-driven initiatives.

Jacob is also a filmmaker. His 2020 documentary, "I'm Not an Indian", explores the history of Dakota Plains First Nation and one of Canada's longest-serving Chiefs. The film won Best International Documentary Short at the Los Angeles Culver City Film Festival and was later licensed to Bell Media.

In 2023, Jacob was named a David Rockefeller Fellow by the Trilateral Commission, joining a select group of emerging leaders under 35 recognized for their potential to address national and global challenges. That same year, Jacob received Trent University's Young Leader Award for outstanding leadership as a young alumnus.

Jacob Dockstator exemplifies excellence in leadership and business, combining strategic vision, cultural integrity, and a deep commitment to community advancement.



TO ALL OUR WINNERS & SPONSORS

Thank you for being part of this celebration
of Indigenous prosperity. Together, we
are building brighter futures and creating
a legacy of growth and opportunity.

Chi-Miigwetch!



Empowering Indigenous Communities

EDF power solutions has more than 1,900 megawatts in partnerships that empower Indigenous communities. We are dedicated to co-developing renewable energy projects that honor your heritage while promoting economic opportunities and protecting natural resources.

*Join us in creating energy designed
for the future.*

Toby Shepherd
Community Engagement Manager
toby.shepherd@edf-re.com
www.edf-re.com



Winner Profile

Business Excellence Award

Award Sponsored By



Niiwin General Partnership Inc.



L to R: Kateri Banning, Fort William First Nation, Owner, Markat Construction & Electrical Services, Fort William First Nation | Carlos Castillo, VP Northern Division, Bearskin Airlines



Kateri Lee Banning is the proud owner and operator of Markat Construction & Electrical Services, a 100% Indigenous company & construction team, serving remote First Nations across Northwestern Ontario. A member of Fort William First Nation and a mother of three, Kateri's journey from childhood dreams to construction leadership is a powerful story of resilience, vision and community commitment.



Her team also provide year round operations and maintenance, airport and water treatment repairs, as well as winter road rescue missions.

Beyond construction, Kateri & the company are committed to giving back. Markat regularly supports Evergreen a United Neighbourhood and well as The Underground Gym. Kateri along-side her company Markat, have recently launched a bursary program for the Indigenous trade students, awarding \$12,000 annually to empower our next generation.

Kateri & Markat's mission is clear: To build safe homes for families and strong communities for our people.

Her work is guided by the principles of building for the next seven generations, ensuring that Indigenous Youth see the trades as a path to empowerment, sustainability and pride.

From a young age m, Kateri was drawn to building, crafting intricate paper cities from cardboard and Kleenex boxes. Despite facing personal challenges in early adulthood, she chose a new path, enrolling in trade school at Confederation College in 2003. As one of only two women in her class, she earned the nickname "princess", which became a badge of honour as she proved her skill and determination.

After graduation in 2005, Kateri co-founded Skaarup Construction, growing it into a multi million dollar business. In 2015, she made the bold decision to restart and to alone own a company, and prioritizing the well being of her children. Today Markat Construction & Electrical Services is a thriving enterprise with a team of over 20 professionals. This includes, but not limited to Red Seal Carpenters, Master Electricians, plumbers, and HVAC specialists.

Kateri's company, MARKAT, builds homes and infrastructure in communities like Kingfisher Lake First Nation, Big Trout Lake First Nation. In 2024 she assisted in the creation of a plan for council, for a 28 home subdivision, with the anticipation of a Spring 2026 start date.





ARE YOU SEEKING FINANCING TO KICKSTART YOUR BUSINESS?

UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL WITH NADF FINANCING



1-800-465-6821



www.nadf.org



info@nadf.org

Apply for up to
\$500K















Presented By



CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS PROSPERITY

PLATINUM SPONSORS



GOLD SPONSOR



SILVER SPONSOR



BRONZE SPONSOR



FRIEND SPONSOR

ORIGIN / Immersive Link



Soar Above the Ordinary

We know that safety, reliability, service, and efficiency are essential to your travel and business needs. That's why we're committed to being the aviation partner that puts you first.

With over 60 years of experience and a fleet of more than 40 aircraft, we offer dependable and flexible charter and scheduled passenger services. Whether it's crew rotations, equipment transport, urgent deliveries, or critical medical shipments, we deliver tailored solutions to meet your needs.

CONNECTING HORIZONS

PERIMETER.CA | 1-800-665-8986

PERIMETER
AVIATION

 **Bearskin**
Airlines

Event hosted by NADF
The first choice for Indigenous business.



Head Office

Orion Building
100 Little Lake Road, Suite 101
Fort William First Nation, ON
P7J 0L2

Tel: 807-623-5397
Toll-Free: 1-800-465-6821

Timmins

273 Third Avenue
Suite 203
Timmins, ON
P4N 1E2

Tel: 807-623-5397
Toll-Free: 1-800-465-6821

Follow Us



NADF1987



NADF_1987



NADF



WWW.NADF.ORG



www.nadf.org



Community Futures Development Corporation
Société d'aide au développement des collectivités