by Julianne Philpott

The S. and A. Inspiration Foundation was founded by Arnold Witzig and his partner Sima Sharifi in 2008 as a not-for-profit corporation. The Arctic Inspiration Prize, made possible through the substantial and generous endowment of the Foundation, recognizes and promotes the extraordinary contribution made by groups for the benefit of the Canadian Arctic and its people.

Officially launched in April 2012 during the International Polar Year 2012 conference, the prize has seen much success to date, with the first annual ceremony held in December 2012. The $1M award was shared amongst four Canadian teams whose projects continue to address pressing issues facing Canada’s Arctic and its people. The four groups awarded were the Arctic Food Network, the Nunavut Literacy Council, Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, and the Thaidene Nene Initiative, a group in Yellowknife that has been aiming to protect an area of their homeland of more than 30,000 km². This initiative alone received $100,000.

But the 2013 awards hit closer to home for those in Labrador. For the initiative entitled Sakkijanginnatuk Nunaliq: Healthy Homes in Thriving Nunatsiavut Communities, the group, comprised of members from the Nunatsiavut Government, the Nunatsiavut Joint Management Committee, the Nain Research Centre and Memorial University, received $350,000 for their initiative promoting the importance of access to culturally suitable and environmentally adaptable housing. The money awarded was for the group’s plan to use this knowledge to build and monitor Nunatsiavut’s first sustainable, multi-unit residential dwelling and establish a prototype for northern housing development.

Many prominent and distinguished Canadians sit on the Selection Committee of the AIP including the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, CBC’s Peter Mansbridge, Eva Aariak, former premier of Nunavut, and Thomas Anguti Johnston, President of the National Inuit Youth Council, and Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation’s President Tom Paddon, who is a strong ambassador the Prize, shining a spotlight on it at the 2014 Northern Lights Business and Cultural Showcase.

Though Arnold and Sima are pleased with the Award’s progress to-date, Arnold confesses that he would like to see more northern businesses nominated for the prize.

“The Arctic Inspiration Prize team recognizes the significant and diverse contributions of the business community in the North in the areas of job creation, job training, infrastructure and community building, to name only a few,” says Witzig. “It is our profound hope to be able to reward and celebrate these remarkable achievements by awarding the Prize to teams that include among their members, representatives of the business community.”

The LNCC and BRCC recently joined AIP as ambassadors of the program, in the hopes that promotional assistance from the LNCC to its Chamber and event networks will further boost the profile of the award and engage the northern business community.

“I am absolutely delighted to welcome to the AIP team, the LNCC and the BRCC as Ambassadors,” says Witzig. “The active engagement of these two northern Chambers of Commerce to discover, nominate, support, mentor and share in the success of prize-winning teams is truly critical.”

The 2014 Award Ceremony will be held in Ottawa in December and will be co-hosted by the Right Honourable Michäelle Jean, Eva Aariak, former premier of Nunavut, and Peter Mansbridge. The AIP is open to applicants with projects both small and large. The 2014 nomination package is available on the website at www.arcticinspirationprize.ca and nominations will remain open until October 1, 2014. ✉