

Towns asked to be ambassadors for Arctic prize

By **STEPHANIE WADDELL**
Star Reporter

WATSON LAKE – Arnold Witzig and his wife, Sima Sharifi, are getting set to leave the Arctic Inspiration Prize they started to other capable, northern hands.

Meanwhile, he's asking communities across the North to act as an ambassador for the fund, which delivers in excess of \$1 million to help start programs across Canada's North.

Witzig addressed delegates attending the Association of Yukon Communities' annual conference in Watson Lake over the May 14-15 weekend.

He called on them, as well as Yukon MLAs, to get behind the award and promote it in their communities.

Witzig has heard it described as the "Nobel (prize) of the North", but he argued the Arctic Inspiration Prize is quite different.

It's awarded not for an achievement that's already happened and not to a single person, but rather for a future project initiated by a team, projects that stand to make a big difference in their communities.

It's an initiative that was created for the North, and it was always intended that it would be led by the North.

Last year, a total of \$1.5 million was doled out, including \$600,000 provided to the tri-territorial partnership of recreation associations – including the Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon – to implement training for recreation leaders in the three territo-



Star photo by **STEPHANIE WADDELL**

AWARD'S PROMOTION URGED – Arnold Witzig speaks earlier this month to delegates of the Association of Yukon Communities' annual conference in Watson Lake.

ries. It was one of three initiatives to be awarded the prize last year.

Witzig is hoping to see \$3 million provided to a variety of projects in 2017, which would provide "many more opportunities" to worthy projects across the North.

While Witzig and Sharifi step back from their involvement to let northerners take over the fund, Witzig said he's been pleased to have a number of Yukon entities sign on as partners.

They include the Yukon government, Air North, the Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association and Yukon North of Ordinary. There's also a long list of partners from the Eastern Arctic.

"We are really grateful," Witzig said, before going on to ask municipal

leaders to take on the role of ambassadors for the prize.

It's a call he's also issuing to other governments – First Nations and MLAs.

Already listed as ambassadors from the territory are the Yukon Chamber of Commerce, the Yukon Research Centre and the Yukon Chamber of Mines.

The role of ambassadors is to spread the word, find teams and projects that could benefit from the prize money and encourage them to move forward in submitting their projects.

Witzig was quick to praise former Yukon commissioner Geraldine Van Bibber, who sits on the selection committee, for awarding the prize, and is well-known for promoting her home territory.

For her part, Van Bibber offered her praise to Witzig and Sharifi in establishing the fund.

"Arnold and Sima have given everything they have to help us," she said, adding she's looking forward to many more Yukon applications coming forward for the Oct. 1 deadline.

"I just love the part about handing out money," Van Bibber said with a laugh.

2015 marked the first year the prize was awarded to Yukoners with the recreation project being led by Anne Morgan, executive director of the Recreation and Parks Association of the Yukon.

The project was also nominated by Zach Bell, an Olympic cyclist who grew up in Watson Lake.

Having the funds to move forward on a project that she and other recreational leaders have been dreaming about for years is a "phenomenal opportunity," said Morgan, who was in Watson Lake for the weekend meeting.

Being presented with the prize was certainly a highlight – "I even got a hug from (CBC television news anchor) Peter Mansbridge," Morgan quipped of the awards ceremony.

However, the work involved in applying and working on the nomination with Bell was a process that taught the recreation groups a lot, she added.

It also forced them to look at issues including how the project could continue after the prize money runs out.

She noted in a subsequent interview that it will mean going after other funding sources that are available for operations.

As Witzig described it, the prize is designed to give major projects that benefit northerners the money to get up and running.

For the recreation associations across the territories, there was about a month of work after the prize was awarded that was focused on the logistics of setting up a bank account that included all three territorial recreation associations for the funding.

A steering committee has also been established to oversee the work and the first part of training for leaders will begin in the fall.

Detailed information on the application process for the Arctic Inspiration Prize is available online at www.arcticinspirationprize.ca



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Remembering Jim Winberg

December 17, 1938 – December 23, 2013

Jim's life in, and love of the Yukon, began in 1966, when he headed north with a friend to do some prospecting – he never left!

His world filled with new friends, many years of work for G.E. Building Supplies, cherished outdoor adventures, curling, chess and bridge; more work at his own Yukon Instant Printing shop until he retired in 1990, and a marriage to Judy Winberg, which reached its 39th year!

Jim enjoyed some later travelling 'Outside' but was always happy to be heading 'home' – and anyway; a favourite song says it, sung by a favourite guy, "Where do you go after Yukon?"

Now, family, friends and acquaintances are invited to that 'future date' promised for an informal gathering to honour Jim and his life amongst us.

Set for **Saturday, May 28, 2016, beginning at 2 p.m.**

at Whitehorse United Church, Main St. there will be a short service followed by time at the Legion, 503 Steele St., to visit with each other, have a toast and snacks and hopefully share some memories you have of Jim, or, between you and other old friends who might be there with you – we never forget loved ones or friends who have been part of our lives and have been good for our hearts and souls

... thank you!