

EMBRACING Iqaluit

one travel mug at a time



By Brandy Lynn Maslowski

Stepping in from frigid subzero temperatures, a young Inuk woman gently lowers her wolf fur hood to take in the warm scent of roasted arabaca beans and fresh baked goodness. Tim Hortons now provides Iqaluit, Nunavut, a customer experience taken for granted in southern Canadian cities.

Three Tim Hortons Express locations opened in early December and locals appear to be loving it.



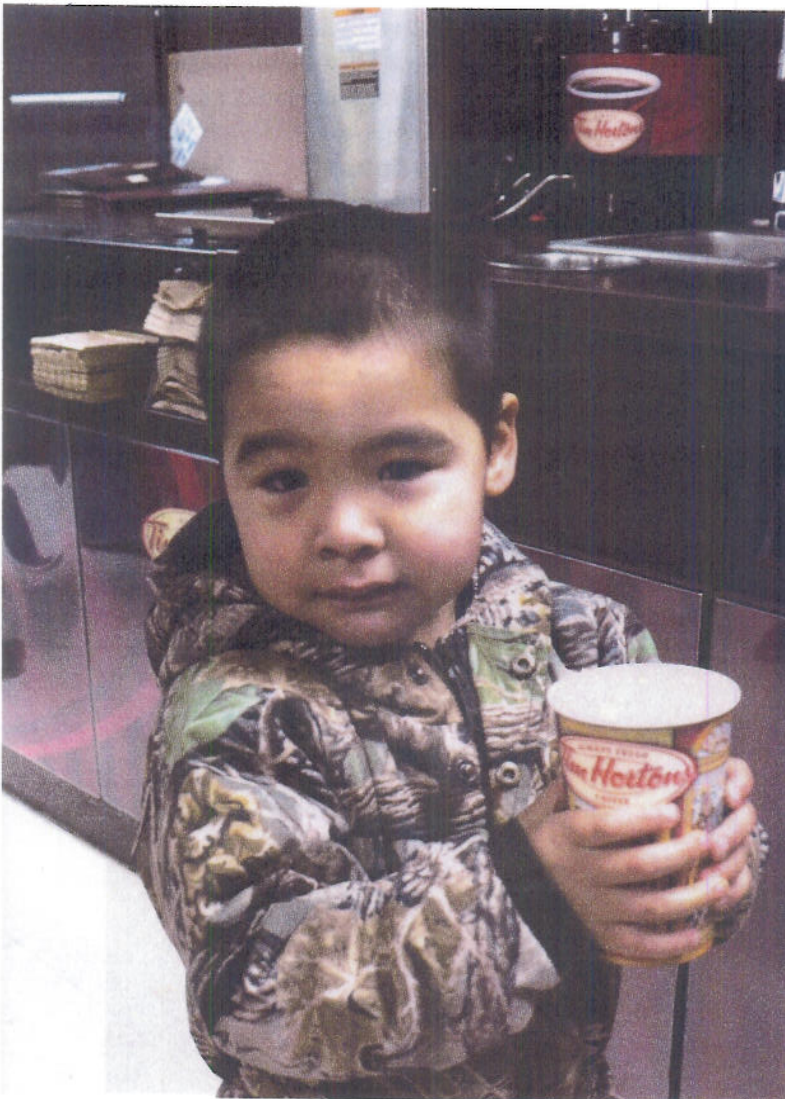
An elder orchestrates a qulliq lighting ceremony at the Tim Hortons' opening

The Nunavut capital, with a population of 7,200, seemed too small for a franchise to be feasible, but just the rumor of a new Tim's stirred up a front page article in the local newspaper.

"People were carrying boxes of doughnuts on flights back to Iqaluit," says Nick Javor, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Tim Hortons. The logistics of transporting goods to this remote location 2,000 km north of Ottawa results in a price increase of 65¢ for a small and 84¢ for a large coffee, but Javor says local response has been good despite the higher cost. "We use the exact same par-baked technology in stores across Canada," he says, "so the product is the same quality everywhere."

When asked about lessons learned in the first month, he says, "We found we didn't have the capacity to handle the customer demand so we've already expanded the food display cases and coffee equipment."

After three years of research Tim Hortons found the right partner, the publicly traded North West Company, to make the franchises work. According to Doug Anderson,



general manager of Major Market Stores, a North West Company subsidiary, North West is the largest aboriginal employer in Canada. It also traces its roots back to the famous historical trading company that went head-to-head with the Hudson's Bay Company over 200 years ago; although the two merged back in 1821, the North West Company was reborn in 1987 as a retailer working primarily in Canada's far north.

Together Tim Hortons and the North West Company decided on three smaller locations using kiosks, rather than one full service restaurant.

"We are proud to be associated with Tim Hortons," says Anderson. "They are a world class partner."

Anderson explains, "They...have a comprehensive training program. It ensures that both sides will be structured for success in providing a top quality product for our customers."

Iqaluit local Katie Inukshuk was sent to Oakville, Ontario for training as the new operations manager of the kiosks. "We are proud of Katie as our first manager of the north," says Javor. "She is very passionate about doing a good job and represents Tim Hortons well. It is her quiet confidence and pride that shines through."

Inukshuk says little, other than, "The training was good."

Aside from herself, she says approximately half the staff is Inuit. Tim Hortons, says Javor, "had an operations training crew go to Iqaluit the week before opening and they stayed two weeks after opening. There were five people involved. Their role was to setup the



Manager Katie Inukshuk

equipment, provide staff training and to help with customer relations."

For its part, Javor says the company has "an on-line, self instruction, aboriginal awareness and cultural diversity training program. This training program covers the indigenous peoples of Canada, history, issues and opportunities."

On specifics about the local culture in Iqaluit Javor says the North West Company, the franchisee owner, is part of Iqaluit and other northern communities and demonstrates appreciation of, and sensitivity to, Inuit people.

Responding to countrywide murmurs about Tim's cups creating unsightly litter, Javor outlines their solution. "To hear that our cups are littering the streets is a problem, so we have worked hard to implement 10¢ off with a travel mug nationwide," says Javor. "We want





Singer Susan Aglukark with a child on stage at the charity event hosted at the local high school

customers to get on the antilitter bandwagon.” Javor states that between five and 10% of customers nationwide now use travel mugs and that number is even higher in university settings.

To kick things off he says they will be giving away 1,000 of the iconic travel mugs at the Iqaluit kiosks in mid-February printed with a special arctic blue design and Inuktitut language. Of course, each will have a coupon inside for a free first fill.

The grand opening at the main Northmart location, which houses the bakery, received a lot of attention. Inukshuk participated in the opening ceremonies, clearly happy that it respected Inuit tradition. “I was proud to cut the ribbon at the opening with the ulu because it is a traditional women’s tool.”

Another opening highlight was the use of qulliq lighting. This is a traditional Inuit lamp with oil and moss lit by an elder to signify the importance of fire for warmth and life, and to honor and respect a gathering or celebration of culture, community, and life.

The festivities also included a fun run early Saturday morning when Tim Hortons, North West Company and renowned Inuk singer/songwriter Susan Aglukark worked together to raise over \$10,000 for local charities. Aglukark performed a charity concert at the local high school with free Tim Hortons fare that evening. Proceeds went to programs such as the Arctic Children and Youth Foundation and the Kamajit Safe Community Pilot Program.

“We welcome new businesses with good corporate citizens to our community,” says the newly elected Mayor of Iqaluit, Madeleine Redfern. “It is important to know it doesn’t just affect our community. This is a gateway now to even more remote communities.”

Photos contributed



An elder and Katie Inukshuk with an ulu at the opening ceremony



Throat singers add their distinctive sound to the Tim Hortons opening celebrations in Iqaluit