



Jason Little:

Weaving Business and Canada's Inuit Culture

By Melanie Plenda / Photos by Beth Pelton



Jason Little



An example from Jason Little's Nunavut Art collection.

Jason Little had canoed and paddled numerous rivers in Canada by the time he and some friends rolled through a 600-mile stretch of the Kazan River that ended for them at the hamlet of Baker Lake in 2008.

The landscape, the wildlife — including caribou, muskox and lake trout — the culture and the Inuit people — all of it, left an indelible print on Little's heart and imagination.

“In addition to my love of canoe tripping, I've always had a profound interest in Native Americans, as well as the Inuit culture,” says Little. “As time passed, I began to think about how I might weave my work as a university marketing professor with my love of the far north.”

Which is why two years ago with the encouragement of both his wife and administrators at Franklin Pierce University in Rindge, where Little is a marketing professor, he applied for a sabbatical. The goal was to embark on a project that would allow Little to mentor a small group of young business entrepreneurs as well as conduct a study that would especially benefit Inuit-owned businesses in Pond Inlet, a small hamlet in the Canadian territory of Nunavut located at the northern tip of Baffin Island in the far north of Canada.

After doing some initial research, he was connected to a woman named Aileen Hope, whom he calls an “angel volunteer in the

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Pond Inlet



A typical Nunavut household



An example from Jason Little's Nunavut Art collection.

community.” Hope had spent some of her early childhood in Pond Inlet and now lives and works there, Little says.

Hope and Little began “meeting” via video conference once a month starting in February 2017.

Hope, for her part, told Little about a group of young Nunavut entrepreneurs she had been meeting with as part of a program called “Inspire Nunavut.” Though that program was winding down, she told him, they wanted to keep meeting and supporting each other, an endeavor Hope was helping to facilitate.

Over the next 18 months, Little conferenced with, and eventually met, five of these entrepreneurs. In that time Little helped them with business strategies, general and specific to their businesses. He also began a research study back at FPU with six undergraduate business students called “A Study of Online Marketing Communication Used by Inuit Owned Organizations.”

The study included securing a list of the 343 Inuit firms that are listed by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI). The team investigated things like how many firms appeared in a Google search, how many firms had a website, Facebook page or utilized other social media platforms.

“We investigated if the firm had a slogan and the key marketing messages the firm clearly communicates. That particular SBA study will be part of my larger study that I am currently working on: ‘A Research Study to Determine Effective Marketing Communication Strategies for Businesses Located in Nunavut, Canada,’” says Little.

During this past July, Little spent about a week in Iqaluit and interviewed a dozen business leaders of organizations that help Nunavut businesses succeed.

He is currently reviewing this input as to how Nunavut businesses are using market communications and how it might be improved.

“I anticipate my summary report to be completed by November 1 of this year and my goal is to distribute this report to all of the Nunavut business organizations that will hopefully benefit by my findings and recommendations,” he said. He also hopes to present his findings at the Nunavut Trade Show in Iqaluit and Northern Lights Conference in Ottawa next year.

We spoke with Little about his trip and the importance of volunteering in other cultures.

Q: What was the most surprising thing you learned about yourself and the people you were helping through this volunteering experience?

A: Because I was able to tie all of my interests together — love of the far north, interest in Inuit culture, and my work as a business professor, I was really in heaven. After the long flight to Pond Inlet, and upon my arrival at the remote airport on a prop plane, I was greeted by my Inuit mentees and some of their friends. This meant a lot to me, as I felt like I was warmly welcomed into a close-knit society. As my work progressed and the days passed at Pond Inlet, local Inuit, including precious

children, began to greet and call me by my name on the streets. I thought that was very special. As for inner strength, I had my moments when I thought, jeez do I really want to travel so far north alone? But what kept me together was knowing I had a wonderful crew at the other end. My most trying experience was flying from Iqaluit to Pond Inlet, when I was informed by the airlines that due to fuel shortages in the northern hamlets, my flight would be rerouted via Hall Beach (another Arctic hamlet) for refueling, so we'd have enough fuel to make it to Pond Inlet!

Q: Why is it important for people to volunteer like this?

A: There are so many hardships in the world, including some in the Arctic. People who take the initiative and volunteer usually help empower less fortunate or at least bring a new perspective as to doing things. In many cases, volunteers help facilitate a positive change that has a lasting impact.

Q: What if any is your next volunteer project?

A: Quite honestly, I hope I am able to continue my work with Nunavut Inuit in helping entrepreneurs develop a business concept, or further a business that is right and fitting for their culture and values. It is a really cool place to be in life. 🇺🇸

Melanie Plenda writes from Keene, New Hampshire



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