



**NORDIQ CANADA ANNUAL AWARDS
2024
PRIX ANNUEL DE NORDIQ CANADA**



Celebrating Canada's cross country skiing community, and the individuals making a difference in our sport

JUNE 20, 2024

The setting – a cross-country ski race at Pioneer Park, just northwest of Toronto. A young Claudia Kerckhoff, accompanied by her mom, is entranced by the famed cross-country ski twins, Shirley and Sharon Firth.

“They came down a hill,” van Wijk remembers, the image seared into her mind like it was yesterday. “Around a corner and then back up a hill, right past me—flew by me, actually—and I was like: ‘Oh. My. God. They never touched the snow!’”

That memory of Sharon and Shirley Firth continues to resonate with Claudia van Wijk, the 2024 recipient of Nordiq Canada’s Firth Award. Presented annually to a woman who has made an outstanding contribution to cross-country skiing in the country, van Wijk is honored to receive an award named after the two icons. Members of the Gwich’in First Nation, the Firth twins were the first Indigenous women to represent Canada at the Olympics and were part of Canada’s first women’s National Ski Team.

“These women,” van Wijk marvels, “could ski as well as the guys. That made such an impression on me. They were a great inspiration; a great model to emulate.”

Following a long athletic career in kayaking, Van Wijk teamed with husband Dirk to expand the Nakkertok Cross Country Ski Club located outside Ottawa. Their investment of land for new trails, and fundraising has expanded the club into one of the largest in Canada.

“I love to ski,” she says. “For me, it’s pure paradise. Just fifteen minutes from Ottawa, our nation’s capital, you’re outside, surrounded by nature, with only the sound of birds chirping... It’s heaven.”

“The biggest reward is seeing how healthy the club is. When you get there on a Saturday morning, it is so colorful, little kids whipping around, most giggling and, yes, some crying. But you know they’re going to fall in love with the sport.”

If the van Wyks hadn’t bought the land, Claudia concedes, it “would’ve been developed, like everything else.”

“So, I feel very, very proud because it’s given a lot to a lot of people; but it’s also given me a lot, too. I love to give back to the sport that’s given so much to me, the way Sharon and Shirley did,” emphasizes van Wijk.



Claudia and Dirk van Wijk at the Nakkertok Nordic Centre.

Other Nordiq Canada award recipients include Reid Carter for the David Rees Award, along with Kevin Pettersen and Sandra Houde for the Volunteer of the

Year Award.

The David Rees Award is presented annually to an individual who has made an outstanding extended commitment to cross-country skiing in Canada.

A long-timer skier himself and division chair of cross-country B.C., Reid Carter founded Black Tusk Nordic Events Society to host the 2023 FIS Nordic Junior and U23 World Ski Championships, and 2022 Nordiq Canada Ski Nationals and U.S. Super Tour Finals in Whistler, B.C. Carter and wife Laura contributed \$1.3 million to make these prestigious events a reality.

Over 15 years, Kevin Pattersen, Volunteer of the Year recipient, helped transform his home club Caledonia Nordic Ski Club in Prince George, B.C. into a world class hosting venue, and the largest club in Canada.

During his tenure he's been vice-president, president, and chairman for a multitude of prestigious national and international events, beginning with the 2015 Canada Winter Games and progressing to the 2024 IBU Para Biathlon World Championships and FIS Para Nordic World Cup Finals.

He's been instrumental in acquiring funding for the improvements at the club, including a \$1 million grant to build a 2.5 km roller ski track.

"For me, (the Distinguished Volunteer Award) really helps fuel the inspiration; knowing that the impact we have is felt far and wide," says Pettersen. "It's acknowledging what we've pulled together to accomplish something here, and being recognized for that is an incredible feeling.

"It draws the spotlight to all the amazing work that everybody – not just me – does to make this an incredible place.

"Just like high-profile athletes inspire the next generation, the recognition of this, we hope, inspires others."



Kevin Pattersen at the 2024 IBU Para Biathlon World Championships

Volunteer of the Year recipient Sandra Houde, a recreational skier and mother of two young skiers, became involved at the Club Nordique Mont-Sainte-Anne in 2017. Since then her commitment has grown adding work for Ski de Fond Québec and the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

A particular joy for her is assisting skiers in the U14 categories to grow their connection to the sport. She does this by organizing competitions, supervising, and developing the competitive program, coordinating the training of officials and youth instructors, managing club clothing orders, and overseeing club infrastructure and events. Houde was instrumental in mobilizing volunteers at the Nordiq Canada Selection Trials in 2023 and a couple of months later the

Coupe Québec Final, after it was canceled at another site.

“I like to see the young athletes accomplish a lot of things,” says Houde. “I also really enjoy welcoming new people to the club; if they have questions, I give them my telephone number because I know what it’s like to be a new family from a different place, to not know a lot of people.

“Competitions are a lot of work, being responsible for the volunteers is a lot of work, but these events wouldn’t be possible without the people involved. It’s not me. It’s a team.”

“In each year since my first, we have seen 15 new families arrive at our club. That’s the best feeling for me.”

The remarkable achievements and contributions of these individuals underscore the vibrant and supportive community within Canadian cross-country skiing. Claudia van Wijk’s profound impact on the Nakkertok Cross Country Ski Club and her connections to the Firth twins highlight the enduring legacy of pioneers in the sport. Reid Carter’s visionary efforts and generous contributions have elevated the status of competitive skiing in Canada, while Kevin Pettersen’s dedication has transformed the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club into a hub of excellence. Sandra Houde’s tireless commitment to fostering young talent and welcoming new families exemplifies the spirit of community and volunteerism that sustains the sport.

As Nordiq Canada continues to honour and recognize these contributions, the inspiration drawn from such dedication promises a bright future for cross country skiing in Canada.