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AWG participants honoured

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Paul Bickford/NNSL photo

Arctic Winter Games participants from Hay River were welcomed home from Nuuk, Greenland, on March 14 by town council. The athletes, coaches, officials and council members at the welcome were, in the front row, from left, Ron Schaub, Elli Cunningham, Michaela Crook, Abby Webster, Fiona Huang and Taylor Maurice. In the second row, from left, are Alex Huang, Andrea Beck, Riella Bordey, Jackie Larocque, Trey Beck, Riis Schaub, Gaius Crook and Lorraine McDonald. In the third row, from left, are Chuck Lirette, Doug Swallow, Robert Plamondon, Clell Crook, Kjel Crook, Tanner Mandeville, Zachary Horton, Bryn Hill, Cassidy Ring, John Hill and Mayor Brad Mapes. In the back row, from left, are Coun. Jason Coakwell, Coun. Vince McKay, Coun. Roger Candow, Coun. Steve Anderson, Coun. Keith Dohey, Coun. Kandis Jameson, Coun. Mike Maher and Deputy Mayor Donna Lee Jungkind.

Athletes, coaches and officials who participated in the Arctic Winter Games from Hay River were honoured by town council upon their return to the community.

Almost all responded to an invitation from town council to be recognized before its March 14 meeting.

"I'd just like to say that I'm extremely proud, like the rest of the council are, of all your accomplishments through the week," said Mayor Brad Mapes, who himself also attended the games in Nuuk, Greenland.

Mapes said he heard many compliments about how athletes from Hay River are so polite.

"You guys were ambassadors for our community and you guys are our best," he said. "Whether you won a medal or not, you guys are superheroes to us."

Coun. Keith Dohey read out the names of everyone from Hay River who participated in the games.

"Congratulations to everyone, and we look forward to having you all back either competing or volunteering for the next Games," said Dohey, referring to the 2018 Games to be co-hosted by Hay River and Fort Smith.

In all, about 28 residents of Hay River participated at the Nuuk games in some capacity.

Among the athletes was Elli Cunningham, who had also participated in biathlon at the previous games in Fairbanks, Alaska.

"This one was really amazing," she said of the Nuuk games. "It was just really nice to go to Greenland. It's similar to here but still it's different."

It was her first time in Greenland, and she found the conditions challenging.

"It was really windy every day and for shooting that's hard because it blows off your shots," she said. "And the wind kept changing, so you'd be midway through shooting and then it would change direction, and it would blow the bullets the other way."

Cunningham came home with a silver medal in the biathlon relay.

Plus, she also came home with memories of what life is like in Greenland.

"We got to see a lot of the culture of Greenland," she said, noting that included visits to a few museums.

Michaela Crook, another biathlete from Hay River, also had a lot of fun in Greenland.

"It was a really, really awesome time," she said.

Crook, who had attended the two previous Arctic Winter Games in Fairbanks and Whitehorse, said the Nuuk Games were her favourite so far.

She thinks the cultural experience is just as important as the games.

"Because you get to meet a bunch of different kids your age who are from different countries and you all sort of share what's different about where you're from," she said. "And definitely the language aspect, because you learn words. I learned words in Danish and Greenlandic. And that was really cool to listen to people talk."

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Weather forecast for Hay River, NT: 12°C, Partly cloudy.



Mapes attended the Games since Hay River and Fort Smith are the next in line to host the event.

"It gives a good opportunity for me to see that it is feasible for our community and Fort Smith to do it," he said. "I think the key is these games are a great way to show how partnerships work and how the communities of Fort Smith and Hay River can work together."

The mayor said his counterpart in Nuuk was very friendly and very open about how the community ran the games.

Mapes said he and Mayor Lynn Napier-Buckley of Fort Smith attended most of the sporting events together as a show of unity between the two communities.

"I think definitely it was a great experience," he said. "I'm glad that I went over there. I pretty well got out to all of our community athletes to just show support to what they're doing and I was pretty impressed, pretty proud of our athletes and our participants, our coaches and our officials who were sent from our community."

At the closing ceremonies on March 11, Mapes and Napier-Buckley accepted a folded Arctic Winter Games flag in recognition of their two towns being the hosts for the next games in 2018.

–Paul Bickford

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