

It's Billy's day

Inuvialuit conservationist honoured with award

by Jason Unrau

Northern News Services

Inuvialuit elder Billy Day was honoured Friday in Vancouver by the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation for his environmental work.

Day was one of 14 aboriginals from across Canada who appeared at a gala event to accept his award, which was broadcast on national television.

"I was somewhat surprised," said Day of his nomination, based primarily on his work for the Beaufort Sea Integrated Management Planning Initiative.

"It means an awful lot to me especially because I accepted it on behalf of our ancestors and elders and the people I worked with."

In addition to finding ways to engage Inuvialuit youth in oceans stewardship, Day was instrumental in the development of the first proposed Marine Protected Area, Tarium Niriyutait, in the Western Arctic.

"It's hard for me to say which is my most memorable moment," said Day of his career, which includes being a founding member of the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-operative.

Born in the 1920s, Day lived in Aklavik until the 1950s, when he moved his family to Inuvik.

So as a conservationist, what does he think of the coming pipeline development?

"I think we have to watch

**COFFEE
Break**



photo courtesy of Sharon Firth

Inuvialuit elder Billy Day is joined by Gwich'in ambassadors Shirley Firth Larsson, left, and Sharon Firth at the 2006 Aboriginal Achievement Awards in Vancouver last Friday evening. Both Day and Shirley were honoured with awards in the categories of Environment and Sport respectively. Last year Shirley's sister Sharon was honoured.

what happens. We can't stop development, but we can certainly sit at the table and minimize the damage that's being done," he said. "Some companies are very good. We can sit down and talk with them and work with them. They are probably more receptive to us

than when we first got our claims (when) all decisions were made in Ottawa."

Land claims involvement

On top of Day's lifelong dedication to protecting the environment, the Inuvialuit owe a great deal to the man for

their land claim. He was the first president of the Committee of Original Peoples' Entitlement, the body that negotiated and in 1984 signed the Inuvialuit Final Agreement with the federal government.

Long-time friend and chair of the World Council of

Whalers, Tom Mexsis Happynook had this to say about Day and his contributions:

"Mr. Day's determination to conserve cultural life ways, values and principles of the Inuvialuit has also spread to other indigenous and costal whaling peoples around the

world," said Happynook. "His lifetime of experience and traditional knowledge brought to the international whaling communities priceless insight about our relationship with nature, the environment and ecosystems, which sustain our families."

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