



Brevig Mission Diomed

Elim

Gambell

Golovin

Koyuk

Nome

Saint Michael

Savoonga

Shaktolik

Stebbins

Teller

Unalakleet

Wales

White Mountain

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## **Six awarded grants in NSEDCE's 2011 Small Business Initiative**

NOME--Six budding business owners in the Norton Sound region received a boost October 11 as Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation awarded a total of \$105,000 in the fourth annual Small Business Initiative (SBI).

From a tour company that aims to give visitors a true taste of life in Western Alaska to a freezer repairman who will be based in the region, the 2011 crop of grant recipients covered a wide array of business proposals.

Modeled after the Alaska Federation of Natives' Alaska Marketplace competition, the SBI invites residents in NSEDCE's 15 member communities to submit detailed business proposals. The applications are evaluated by a panel of judges who are independent of NSEDCE.

The judges reviewed a total of 16 applications this year, whittling them down to seven finalists. The finalists are invited to Nome to present their business plans in person, allowing the judges a chance to interview each presenter. The process culminates with the judges designating portions of the available \$105,000 to the proposals they feel have the best chance of succeeding and benefitting the region.

NSEDCE congratulates the 2011 SBI grant recipients and encourages Norton Sound residents to apply for the 2012 competition. Details on the SBI and the 2011 application can be viewed [here](#). Please note that the 2011 application is presented as a rough guide for prospective 2012 applicants, as the 2012 application may differ from previous versions.

### **And the winners are...**

#### **Aurora Johnson/Siku Tours**

With the slogan, "Don't Just Visit, Live It", Unalakleet's Aurora Johnson is working to start Siku Tours. Johnson plans to offer clients a more hands-on experience than traditional tours by creating packages that are largely built around the subsistence activities that make up such a significant part of the lifestyle in rural Alaska. Johnson aims to show visitors more than just the landscape of the region. "Other tours give a small taste of what Alaska is like," she said. "I love to share our tradition, our way of life, our culture."

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Johnson said Siku Tours will offer trips that feature activities such as winter crabbing, sea mammal viewing, berry and greens picking, ice fishing and northern lights viewing. The tours will change with the seasons. She said that the venture should impact more communities than just Unalakleet, noting that trips like dog sled tours would take visitors—and potential customers—through neighboring villages.

Johnson hopes to capitalize on the rising popularity of eco-tourism and Alaska's prominence in the realm of reality television, including the Discovery Channel series "Flying Wild Alaska" which is predominately filmed in Unalakleet.

Johnson received \$25,000 in funding, much of which will be directed toward accommodations for Siku Tours' guests.

#### **Andreanna Grishkowsky/Ocean Stone Ulu**

Unalakleet's Andreanna Grishkowsky has given a new twist to an ancient design. Under the name Ocean Stone Ulu, Grishkowsky uses rocks she has gathered from the beach as handles on the traditional Alaska Native knives.

The idea for the distinctive ulu knives arrived shortly after Grishkowsky finished a graduate program in design and returned to Unalakleet. "I was walking along the beach and it just clicked," she said. In addition to the unique handles, Grishkowsky's knives feature stylishly shaped blades.

Her ulu design gained a wider audience after a knife she donated to the Sewing Circle Auction in Unalakleet spurred interest and requests for more. Grishkowsky realized that she likely had a marketable product on her hands. "I've made 50 [knives] between the auction and now," she said.

Grishkowsky was awarded \$25,000 in SBI funds. She said she plans to use the award money to invest in more raw material for the blades, to set up a shop and for marketing and a website.

#### **Frank Doty/Norton Sound Refrigeration Inc.**

Also from Unalakleet, Frank Doty plans to take the training and experience he has gained from NSEDC and offer his services as a refrigeration technician. Doty is currently the assistant manager of the Norton Sound Seafood Products plant in Unalakleet, a position he plans on keeping as he operates his refrigeration business on the side.

Doty, whose training included heating and ventilation as well as refrigeration service, noticed a need for people with his skill set in the region. "There are very few refrigeration technicians. I would like to serve the region's needs," he said. As many Norton Sound residents know, when a freezer or cooler stops working, finding someone to fix it most often means a long wait for someone from Anchorage to come make an expensive repair—if they can find someone to come at all.

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Doty sees potential in working to serve the entire region. He hopes to eventually expand and hire others to help him grow the business. “Expansion, that’s what I’m looking for,” he said.

Doty was awarded \$16,000.

### **Michelle Ames-Keene/JAK Enterprises dba La Cabana**

Nome’s Michelle Ames-Keene has already had a small taste of small business. In what could be called a precursor to her new venture, Ames-Keene set up shop on Nome’s West Beach last summer to sell coffee drinks, soups and hamburgers.

With La Cabana, the food and coffee drink part of the business carries on, but it won’t stay put. Ames-Keene plans to make her food service mobile. “It’s a small bus that would have a fully contained kitchen,” she said. “The idea is to do fresh food, fast.” She said she aims to serve events and conferences, as well as being able to catch tourist traffic in the summer. She plans to maintain a focus on healthy items and will not be serving French fries or soda.

Like Doty, Ames-Keene has her eyes set beyond her immediate neighborhood. She said if the business takes off, she would like to offer scaled-down versions of the food service in kiosks in other Norton Sound communities besides Nome. She thinks setting up near the villages’ airstrips could prove fruitful.

Ames-Keene was awarded \$14,000 through the program. She said the funding will primarily be directed at acquiring the mobile unit and outfitting it for food service.

### **Erin Forton/Bering Tea**

Nome’s Erin Forton is also looking to feed Nomeites and visitors to the Gold Rush City with healthy fare. Forton plans to open Bering Tea in a building she recently purchased, fittingly, on Bering Street. Bering Tea will incorporate a bakery, coffee shop and health food cooperative under one roof. “There is a history in Nome of coffee shops and bakeries doing well,” she said.

These two aspects of the business will help fund the venture she truly wants to bring to Nome, the health food cooperative. A health food co-op essentially works like a bulk food section in a supermarket, except that the bulk food is brought to the cooperative’s members rather than them travelling to the store.

Forton is excited about Bering Tea’s location, noting that it is along the route that leads to two of Nome’s largest employers, Kawerak and Norton Sound Health Corp. “It’s the perfect business location,” she said.

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Forton sees a need in Nome for a coffee shop that has a quiet atmosphere where people can get a cup of tea and sit in a corner and read or study. She also plans to offer health food classes at Bering Tea that would be associated with the cooperative.

Forton was awarded \$13,000 in grant funding. She said much of her funding will be directed toward the renovation of her kitchen and the purchase of equipment, such as an espresso machine.

### **Chester Millet, Jr./LJM Enterprises**

Unalakleet's Chester Millet, Jr.'s venture, LJM Enterprises, is built upon a renewable resource—snow. LJM Enterprises is in the business of getting rid of the white stuff that arrives in abundance in Unalakleet for more months than most residents would like. "You know with snow, it's going to be there every year," he said.

Millet said beyond the snow removal service provided by the city in Unalakleet, options are limited for those who need more areas cleared. Using a Bobcat—a small loader—Millet started clearing snow on his own last year as well as renting the equipment out to others. The latter proved the most profitable as construction and other work crews traveling to Unalakleet to work often needed the Bobcat to get their jobs done. "There were a lot of companies coming through," he said.

Millet is looking to expand his business by adding a large snowblower to his available equipment. He said the \$12,000 he was awarded will be directed toward that purchase and to help cover freight expenses.

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**About NSEDCC:** Norton Sound Economic Development Corp. is a private 501(c)4 non-profit corporation representing 15 member communities and more than 8,490 people in the Bering Strait Region of Northwestern Alaska. NSEDCC is one of six Community Development Quota organizations in Alaska. NSEDCC maintains a balance between distant-water fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. Key to that balance is the establishment of programs designed to provide immediate benefits to the residents of the region along with the continued pursuit of longer-term investments that provide a stable source of economic strength. For more information, see [www.nsedc.com](http://www.nsedc.com).

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