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# The True North strong and bimonthly

Ben Kaplan, National Post

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Cameron French / Reuters

Covering the great expanses of the Canadian North, the journalists for *Up Here* magazine have had to brave sub-zero temperatures for 25 years, but the payoffs, in the form of spectacular vistas such as ...

Greg Keilty is a circulation expert who was involved in the launch of *Zoomer* magazine and worked with *The Walrus* and *Saturday Night*. A publishing industry veteran, Keilty has investigated magazine offices from Newfoundland to Alberta to Winnipeg. However, upon his first encounter with *Up Here* magazine in Yellowknife, he was shocked by an environment well outside the confines of everyday publishing.

"You'd look outside their window and see a dog walk by with a caribou head in its mouth from the neighbour's garbage," Keilty says. "It was a little weird, but the North is an unbelievable place to do business. I think that individuality has been reflected in the success of *Up Here*."

Amid the lay-offs and closures of Canada's ailing magazine industry, *Up Here* remains a unique success story from the Northwest Territories. With a \$2-million annual operating budget, and another \$40,000 kicked in from the government, the magazine

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has steadily grown its readership to 22,000, and been turning a profit for the past 13 years.

"We look at the current economy as an opportunity," says founder and publisher Marion LaVigne. "Cost of printing has gone down and there's more interest in the North. It makes it much easier to hire good people away from Ontario."

This month, LaVigne is toasting her magazine's 25th birthday. She credits her survival to an unbending belief in the magazine's mission: Providing an energetic embrace of life in Canada's North.

"We knew absolutely nothing about starting a magazine," says LaVigne, who calls Yellowknife's current -20C cold snap a heat wave after their month-long slog through -40C. "We just wanted the rest of Canada to see where we lived."

Indeed, through colourful photographs of dog mushers, muskox and mountain ranges and epic stories of adventure like surviving a rock slide in Prince William Sound, *Up Here's* Yucan flavour has made it manna for a hungry subscription base. In 2008, the magazine expanded its brand with the launch of *Up Here Business*. And, with the help of Greg Keilty and a newsstand distribution network that now includes Canada's busiest airports, they aim to reach 25,000 readers this year.

"Good magazines have a voice and a personality, and that's something you find in *Up Here*," says Marco Ursi, editor of *Masthead* magazine. "They've learned what their readers want and in so doing, have carved themselves out a unique niche. If they keep doing what they're doing, I can see them being around for a very long time."

The magazine has won five gold Western magazine awards, but also attracted its share of controversy. The August, 2006, issue featured a cover image of a man hiking through southern Yukon wearing only his boots.

"People were all upset about a bare bum on the cover, so we had to reprint it with the picture of a fish - also naked I might add," LaVigne says. "Personally, I never understood what the issue was. But it was worth it for the publicity."

The magazine currently has subscribers from as far afield as China and Germany, and actually has its biggest readership in Ontario. The goal is not only to someday have a circulation which surpasses 50,000, but also to win the National Magazine Award.

"In the early days we should have fallen, we lost a pile of money and were foolish and young," says LaVigne, "but we always believed in our publication. We always had a missionary's zeal for the north."

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