

New 'Celebration of the Arts' night a huge hit with local community



By Constance Scrafield

Re-scheduled and given a new name, Orangeville's former Mayor's Arts Awards Breakfast was staged this year as an evening event and titled Celebration of the Arts. The venue also shifted to the Opera House.

The purpose remained the same: to recognize a few of the many who contribute to the tremendous wealth of art for which this region is justifiably famous. The awards are given, not only to individual artists but also to organizations, businesses and events which by their efforts and production add to the richness of the culture here.

So, instead of breakfast at seven in the morning, there were trays and trays of savoury finger food, hand-delivered around the Atrium, where all gathered, prepared and on offer by the Mad Hatter pub. They even had a fryer on a truck in the parking lot so that the deep-fried items could be served hot and fresh.

The awards event was the brainchild of Lori Szarmes, Executive Assistant at the Town of Orangeville. Mary Rose, a town councillor at the time, and then-mayor Rob Adams, went with her idea to hold an awards breakfast, honouring some of the well-known, aspiring with promise and ambition, supportive of the arts through a business or organization and an advocate to volunteers without which no arts events could happen.

Some of the awards themselves begin with the word Community, for example, Community Impact by A Business.

The emphasis is on community and the good done to it by those who exist within it. Likewise with the awards to individuals, part of the consideration by the judges (who are outside this community), in addition to their talent and standing in the arts, is how they contribute to the community and to other individuals in the arts community or elsewhere.

So, like so much of what interests and concerns Orangeville and Dufferin, the welfare of the people who live here ? the community ? is reflected in the whole philosophy of these awards.

Creating this awards event went hand-in-hand with the Provincial and Federal Government's new 'Cultures Days,' which they designated the last weekend of September, in 2010.

The first of the awards breakfast was held in 2010 at the Tony Rose Memorial Sports Centre. It was a charming event, all of us up early hurrying to be on time, where we might not normally be meeting quite so soon in the day. Still, the tradition is handed down to us from the farmers who have been the back bone of this community since its original settlement. Farmers meet early for breakfast; they still do in our rural villages where the restaurants or coffee shops exist.

This rural community established an awards breakfast as a natural notion, right back to how people in the country meet, ever since there were immigrant farmers here to meet.

It was inevitable, however, that this current switch to an evening occasion would take place as modern mentality generally slips away from rural traditions in many ways. Chair of the Town's Arts and Culture Committee, Councillor Sylvia Bradley, and Mayor Jeremy Williams were the two this time around, who re-set the event, giving it that fresh name.

Mayor Williams told the audience that arts and culture plays an important role, from its economic value to its creation of a healthy and vibrant community.

Members of Theatre Orangeville's Musical Young Company provided the entertainment of the evening with a selection of music from Les Miserables They were nominated, as well as Theatre Orangeville's Drama Young Company, which produced Peter Pan as a first theatrical performance on the Amphitheatre on Island Lake, for the Creative Cultural Event Award.

It was Peter Pan that won; both shows broke all the records, with Les Mis overselling tickets to the point where an extra show was added, which also sold out within hours of the announcement. This was an absolute first for Young Company.

Attendance to Peter Pan, with a possible audience capacity in front of the amphitheatre of over 1,000 people, also set new records for attendance at 1,500 for the weekend.

Lisa Way, who dazzled audiences with her Oh, Canada, We sing for Thee! last June and who has premiered many of her beautiful shows here, won Established Artist and there is a story: in 2011, her husband and Artistic Director of Theatre Orangeville, David Nairn, won the Established Artist. He was not able to attend the event, so, Ms Way accepted on his behalf.

This year, she was not able to be with us and Mr Nairn accepted on her behalf.

Emerging Artist was given to Andrew Cleveland who had won the Student Artist some years ago. He told us he was happy to say, "I am not a starving artist." He is a costume designer working on major shows in Toronto and elsewhere but having his start here. He encouraged young artists to follow their dreams.

The Student Award went to Jessica Anderson, a musician, singer, composer who is very involved with Orangeville Music Theatre, as well as teaching music to children.

Heather Holmes was awarded Arts Educator for her many years teaching music in studios, with OMT and her Homeschool Music Program.

Long-term volunteer on so many levels within the arts community, Harvey Kolodny, was awarded the Arts Volunteer Advocate. He reminded us all of the benefits to both the arts and the individuals volunteering provides.

John Lockyer, Orangeville Dairy Queen Grill and Chill's owner, thanked his mother for encouraging the business to think of supporting the arts, rather than sticking exclusively to sports.

HatsOnDufferin, brand new to the arts scene, won Community Impact. See their feature in this issue.

Master of Ceremonies Wayne Townsend congratulated all of the nominees, stating they have enhanced arts and culture in the community.

We dressed nicely for the breakfast and we dressed for the evening as well. Accustomed as we all are to eat with one hand and drink from the other while we chat happily in the comfortable welcome of the Opera House and Town Hall, the evening rang out like many others and we were pleased to be in a place we almost call home. To think of how very many of these gatherings are in honour of the arts.

Next up, the opening night of Theatre Orangeville's first play of the season, Sugar Road, coming October 19.