

Regional and community arts councils working to become a significant part of community infrastructure

by Kate O'Neil

The BC Assembly of Arts Councils will be meeting in Fort St. John for their annual convention September 29-October 2, 1994.

More than one hundred arts councils come under the umbrella of the assembly and 120 delegates are expected to attend the convention from outside the region, and local organizers hope for 30 from within.

The roles and responsibilities of all levels of the arts in the province will be discussed and Sue Popesku, coordinator for the regional arts council, said it's likely the main focus of the '94 assembly will deal with arts councils and their relationships with local governments.

"I think we're going to be municipally oriented in this conference because of the coming elections. Many city councils give money to the arts, our city is not praised enough for that. The Arts Council alone gets \$6,500 for all its 26 member

groups, the museum and library gets x number of dollars," she said.

Yvonne Elden, President of the Regional Arts Council, said they want to expose this community's arts groups to others in the province to "get them tied together and get their heads out of the sand in their own communities."

Local arts councils aren't just a small club, Popesku said, "they are a service organization in every community, they deal with the actual fabric of every day living in the community." With this in mind the three levels of arts councils in the province are discussing training for members to deal effectively with community organizations and government to increase awareness for the arts.

Currently arts organizations are viewed as being elitist or specialized and arts councils from the provincial level to the local level want to be part of community planning and devel-

opment to integrate the arts into society.

"We have a very serious problem right now in terms of the arts in the schools," Popesku said. "When money is lacking what goes first is the arts, when in fact should that be the case, should they go anywhere, shouldn't they be escalated instead of cutback in hard times?"

Popesku said \$500 million will be cut from the national arts budget over the next five years, and yet the arts, be it dance, theatre, music, painting, sculpture, or weaving, are all vehicles for cultural expression; something that easily illustrates the varied cultures in our communities, both locally and nationally.

In addition to fostering a greater acceptance and awareness of the arts as a valuable component of society through the school system, the arts councils see a need to have members sitting on the parks and recreation
(continued on page 9)

Assembly of arts councils coming to FSJ

(continued from page 8)

tion and the healthy communities committees. "The council's goal is to generate a broad appreciation in the community, for the arts beginning with school age children, teach appreciation and then let it expand into the community," Popesku said.

In the broadest picture she said the Assembly wants the arts to be accepted as part of our daily lives. Children learn to play hockey, football, and baseball and she said they should also learn to play an instrument, to learn how to get up on stage and play a part.

With this experience, when they become adults they can better understand the person who may be over dramatic, who may come from a different cultural background, and they see the cultural differences and they accept them, said Popesku.

"What we're saying is we want to make better all round people, who because of that become more understanding of the world around them and more tolerant of their neighbors."

At a community level they want to make sure the arts councils are strong so they can carry on these ideas. Elden and Popesku said they hope the assembly broadens the vision of the members of the local council so they see the need to commit to developing the infrastructure and not just to specific projects.

Elden said having the Assembly in Fort St. John will bring other members of the provincial councils into this region so they can take a different perspective of the provincial picture as well as understanding the needs of this community within the arts council context.