

Why the program is exemplary:

There are a number of reasons why any city would love to see a program like our **Northern Lights Festival ice and snow events**. The main reasons have to do with the way members of the community are involved, from corporate sponsorship to the participants and helpers to the audience of the completed sculptures. These are events that go so smoothly, and are so well received, they cannot help but continue to grow and be emulated by other communities.

The **ice sculpting** is the main event in the series of programs within the Northern Lights Festival. Although we can usually depend on cold weather in the winter months, significant snowfall required for snow sculpting cannot be planned. We like to have the snow event, because it does not require power tools to work, meaning that whole families can participate.

The Festival of Northern Lights is not just an opportunity for people of the community, but involves businesses as well. Our artist mentor, Peter Vogelaar, was sponsored by a local business, and other businesses donated prizes to sculptors. It surely boosts community spirit when so many sectors of the community are seen working together.

Any city that has cultivated relationships with other community organizations in developing programs will know how profitable it is to the community it serves and how mutually beneficial it is to the partners. Such is the case in the partnership between the City of Fort St. John and the Fort St. John Community Arts Council. We both respect our areas of expertise, and neither attempts to do the other's job - both partners in this event can say that it could not be done without the other. What comes out of it is an event in which anybody in the community who wishes to try their hand can do so, as well as a beautiful installation of community art that everybody else can enjoy.

This community event draws upon talent from our diverse population and promotes pride and awareness of the arts in the city of Fort St. John. This event is open to all levels of expertise, with the vast majority beginners so anyone can participate and learn the art of ice sculpting. It is also a time for the arts community and the city to work in the arts together and celebrate the value that community art projects can bring to the City of Fort St. John.

Learning to ice sculpt is the focus of the workshop. A **People's Choice Award** is given among the participants and the other awards are all given by random draw so all the participants have a chance to win.

We included a **Mayor's Challenge Award** for the first time in 2004 to create a sense of fun and have participation from neighbouring communities with the City of Fort St. John officials. In addition our MLA, Energy Mines and Petroleum Resources Minister Richard Neufeld and Peace River South MLA Blair Lekstrom also participated in this event. There was also a cross border involvement with participants from our neighbouring community Grand Prairie the 'Swan City'. The participation of City Officials from neighbouring

communities was a great addition to the event because they brought a lot of enthusiasm to the day.

The spectators of the event also enjoy the workshop in that they can view the techniques and tools used to create the wonderful ice sculptures. Viewing the sculptures on the days following the event is also a wonderful time to get out and celebrate the arts in the community and appreciate the impressive sculptures beginners can create.



Photo Credit: Eliza Stanford



Photo Credit: Sue Popesku

How it demonstrates innovation and creativity:

The Festival of Northern Lights ice and snow sculpting event is, of course, inherently creative, but nothing like this has ever taken place in Fort St. John before and so it required much innovation to accomplish.

These events so wonderfully bring the arts into the everyday of the community. It is certainly not unusual to have icy-cold weather here in December and January and we believe people have come to appreciate the positive side of ice and snow – they can be the medium for artistic expression. Working with ice or snow seems to be less intimidating to the untrained artist than other forms of artistic expression. In fact, many of the participants are not involved with any other art form. Sculpting ice or snow is certainly not seen as an activity reserved for the artistic elite, but rather as almost a child-like past time.

We in Fort St. John are so fortunate to have known internationally famous Peter Vogelaar (the snow and ice sculpting artist we brought in to help), as he used to live in this community. His example and experience help to make this event the success it is. He only started sculpting ice and snow about a dozen years ago and he always brings inspiring pictures of the amazing creations he has seen and worked on at various international events. **(To view some of these, please go to www.snowsculpture.com.)** With Peter's aid, participants are able to make their visions into reality - he offers practical suggestions in both the planning and execution of the participants' designs.

The ice sculpting event is also a wonderful innovation in that it uses for a backdrop the city's summer water park. Normally this area would go untended in the winter, but city staff transforms it, with signage and special lighting effects, into a huge winter art installation.