

# On To The Millennium

## North Peace Cultural Centre

Year-end Report December, 1997

### Snapshot of 1997

This was a very busy year for the Cultural Centre. We had two very successful fund-raisers, a very busy spring and fall in the theatre, three well-attended ArtSpace sessions, capacity room rentals and 12 Art Gallery Openings



### Peace Gallery North

The Gallery continues to move forward as an important public exhibition space. Local artists are comfortable there and feel a sense of ownership. This is key to a successful community gallery. It is also now recognised on a provincial level with a \$5000.00 operating grant that we are confident will be continued. The Gallery is part of our core operation and as such receives a significant



portion our operating revenues. As galleries have very limited means to generate revenue, it must be judged by the service it provides the community.

## SERVICES PROVIDED

**P**eace Gallery North operates several programs that have, as their primary objective, access to the gallery by members of the community. This extends to all ages and represents a very large cross-section of the regional population. Artists and volunteers live throughout the North Peace and regularly see their work featured in the gallery. Equally important is the access young people have to the gallery's services. Through our partnership program with School District 60, and the effective work of curator April Ingham (currently on maternity leave) we have reached out with programs such as the Kid's Fun for All, which is an unjuried art competition open to all ages. Further, North Peace Senior Secondary is given the opportunity for a student curator to put on an exhibition featuring the work of high school students.

### First Nations

**A**nother objective has been to seek out ways to involve local First Nations artists to use the gallery and to exhibit work that allows for a greater cross-cultural understanding. Each year the gallery has earmarked at least one project to further this goal and this year it was Canadian Heart and Soil. This was an exhibit that focused on the land and what it means to us and how it affects our artistic expression. This was a very successful exhibit that allowed a doorway into what makes our community tick and received very positive feedback. Beyond local exhibitions, the gallery presented an exhibit featuring the work of George Littlechild, an internationally renowned artist who we brought in as a co-presentation with the Dawson Creek Art Gallery.

### Christmas Craft Market

**T**here is gray area that galleries fall into that deals with the arguments of what is art and what is craft. And should art be judged by either its commercial value or its decorative qualities? While we may choose to leave the first question alone, the second is one that continually confronts us. Our gift shop focuses on high-end crafts and artwork, but once a year we focus all of our energies on producing what is now a very anticipated event - the Christmas Craft Market. As we are not yet in a financial position to purchase significant quantities of wholesale goods for resale, the market remains by a large a consignment arrangement. This does not allow us to

show a tremendous profit and therefore must be considered another community service. On its opening day this year, well over 700 people walked through the doors and over \$4000.00 worth of sales were rung up. Business continues to be brisk. Overall the gallery welcomed over 6000 people last year. It presented the works of over 100 local artists, and encouraged the talents of over 250 young people.

## The Theatre

**A**ctivity in the theatre continues to be brisk. Last year there were 50 events in the theatre with a total of 97 days booked, or 1.9 days per week. Our goal is to get that figure up to 2.5 days per week and revenues to \$30,000.00 from 24,000.00. There continues to be increased theatre use by non-arts groups and this is a trend we will continue to encourage. We have been very fortunate to have in our employ a very qualified and easy-going Technical Director. Martin Emslander has been instrumental in securing our relationship with the school district and serves as a mentor for many young people who have expressed an interest in technical theatre (where the really good-paying jobs are!). Many of these young people were also at-risk and we believe they have been helped by finding a niche and an supervisor who treats them with respect but expects results from them.

These are services you cannot put a price tag on, but serve to illustrate the impact that facilities, such as a community theatre, can have.

Again, our relationship with SD 60 has had a profound impact on our ability to serve the needs of young people. There are approximately 20 events per year that school children are brought to the Cultural Centre to watch. One would be hard-pressed to find a student in the district that has not been inside the theatre. The work of Bob Bennetts of the school district has been instrumental in ensuring that this relationship is maintained and strengthened each year.

The other area of great satisfaction is the number of young people who have had the opportunity to perform upon the stage. Last year over 700 children were featured performers on their community's stage. The impact this has on the students in terms of trust and self-esteem is immeasurable. It is also an experience that would not be available to them if they lived in a larger centre. The ability of young people to **fundamentally** be part of their community's arts scene is a true strength of the North Peace, and one that we can be very proud. These young people are future audience members, policy makers,



economic generators and ambassadors. They are vital to the well-being of the Cultural Centre.

## Theatre Presentations

Although not part of our original business plan, and designed to operate on a cost-recovery or cost-plus basis, perhaps no single activity has the ability to increase our profile and guide our impact than the performing arts events that the Cultural Centre presents. They are the single biggest attraction for historic non-users to come to the building. They have the ability to change minds, excite audiences, and introduce people to live performance. A live performance happens once, and those who are there to share it become part of the process. If you are in a theatre with about 400 strangers and you witness something extraordinary, it is an amazingly unifying experience.

We strive to provide a balanced program of music (popular, country, classical), dance, theatre and family entertainment. As we are somewhat geographically challenged, we often do not get quite the choice that other centre's might, but on balance we have been able to offer 9 events last year and over 58 since our June 1992 opening. As mentioned above, the objective is to make these a cost-plus operation, however, they two must be considered a community service. They do not return sufficient revenue to make them a viable operation for a private impresario, and indeed are a risk activity that could quickly bankrupt the one-off presenter.

However, their ability to engage the community and raise the profile of the building make them a very important part of our operations.

## ArtSpace Classes

As one of the only providers of arts and leisure classes in the community, we provide another public service that is expected to operate on a cost-plus basis. In this past year we operated three sessions that served over 700 people, half of whom were pre-schoolers. This year we entered into a partnership with Northern Lights College to co-present and market key classes to the community that the college no longer has room for. We also changed direction somewhat last year, cutting back the number of classes offered and keeping close control of the administration of the program. With the skills of our current co-ordinator Judy Odendahl, we have been able to see a healthy return to the general operations of the

Centre. That being said, if you were to factor in the rental rates of those classes and the marketing required to provide them, they to, become another community service.

ArtSpace Classes remain another strong area that the community utilises our facility. They are an essential element within the community and have served as an excellent way for new arrivals in the community to get involved.

## Food and Beverage Service

This is the one area of our facility that is operated most like a commercial venture. Although like any business it has taken longer than anticipated to show its return on the renovation investment we made, it is now operating strongly in the black and should prove to be a strong revenue source in 1998. Having the ability to market the centre's rooms with control over the catering component has become a great strength. It allows us more flexibility in pricing and services offered. The cafe will never be a huge money maker, it simply costs too much to operate and is really only viable for 2 hours at lunch. With staffing and the cost of supplies factored in, its value to the Centre has to be its ability to again generate more traffic, offer a desired service, and to make the concourse an attractive and vital space. Catering on the other hand is a strong revenue generator and one that will continue to attract new customers. Janine Jacques has managed to operate both services efficiently and her reputation as a chef continues to attract new customers. The potential gross revenue for this next fiscal year could be well in excess of \$100,000.00. Community feedback on both services has been very positive.

This year was the first for the Centre's B liquor licence. This has greatly simplified our beverage services and is now a much more profitable operation. Our budget estimates for next year are very conservative, and we hope to see a substantial return on bar sales. Although some may be philosophically opposed to liquor sales subsidising a public facility, these beverages are part of our culture, and are desired, and they do have the ability to enhance our bottom line.



## Room Rentals

This is an area of our operation that changes Cultural Centre to Community Centre. This is not a bad thing, although at times some of the uses might be seen as incongruous.

Our goal last year was to continue to increase non-arts use of the rooms and to increase rental revenue. This has occurred, with room rentals far exceeding those of the theatre.

We continue to provide rooms at below cost to local arts and non-profit groups. Attempts to increase these amounts to at least a cost basis have simply resulted in those groups going elsewhere. The policy has been to see these groups as essential to the creation of the Centre and important to its on-going operation. The concept of user-pay is arguable and perhaps the designers of the Centre were overly-optimistic in their prediction of any community's ability to pay the true cost of using public facilities. There are also some groups that provide a valuable service to the community and are simply unable to pay for the facility. Groups such as the Community Justice Program require ad hoc informal space that we have been able to provide for them.

Again, we provide a community service to these groups that gives them an affordable home, and creates a sense of ownership of the facility.

## Fund-raising

Because of the precarious nature of our finances, Centre staff went forward to aggressively pursue fund-raising initiatives to assist operations. Greatest success was achieved with event-based fund-raisers and event-based sponsorship. Going against our efforts is the community perception that the Cultural Centre is a municipally-operated facility, and that it is so busy that it must be making a ton of money. We can take these both as compliments, in that we have been able to, on a shoestring budget, operate a building to a civic facility standard, and that our activity suggests a level of wealth that is unfortunately unfounded!

Our ANNIVERSARY SHOWCASE in June served to not only return about \$6000.00 to our coffers, but it also gave local talent the opportunity to perform to a wider audience. Our JOIN US! sponsorship plan with our theatre presentations quickly brought in over \$10,000.00 because of the marketing opportunities the Centre was able to

offer. This Christmas we staged a very successful FESTIVAL OF TREES which netted over \$10,000.00. Thanks to the tireless efforts of co-ordinators Sue Carson and Shar Coultry, the event was well-attended, extremely well supported by all levels of the community and will most definitely become an annual event. All told, fund-raising generated an additional \$26,000.00 (net) this year of new revenue.

## Successes

The Cultural Society has accomplished many goals, as detailed above. If we were to remove this building, we would all agree there would be a huge hole in the community, both figuratively and literally. We provide a first rate, respected locally and provincially, art gallery. We have a beautiful theatre that is the envy of half the province and is used extensively by both artists and audiences. We offer a secure, attractive home to the Public Library where we both benefit from each other's presence. We offer a lively, attractive cafe for people to meet, eat and drink. We have rooms for all members of our community to use; industry, education, agriculture, governments, arts groups, businesses, community groups and individuals.

Our marketing has been consolidated into one main tool, FRONT ROW CENTRE. This allows us to promote and market all aspects of the Centre including the library. We not only save on publication and distribution costs, we also provide a more professional look that is recognisable and anticipated.

We provide opportunities for artistic expression for the whole community through ArtSpace Classes and also allow people with special skills to share with those who wish to learn.

Our greatest personal success, and the one that the staff feels most proud of, is the integration and representation of young people in all aspects of our operation. This provides a vitality and excitement within the Centre that is priceless.

## Challenges

Our greatest challenge remains the difference between the services we provide and the cost to provide those services. Although there are user fees for most core activities, most are at or below cost and do not truly represent the cost to provide those services. Like all public facilities, collectively we can afford to provide



certain services only if everyone in the community contributes to them i.e.: pools, arenas, tennis courts, parks, community centres. As there is no guarantee of any immediate change in either our core funding or our ability to charge substantially more for our services, other efficiencies must be explored. As evidenced by next year's budget there is very little, if any, waste in our operation and indeed, when one considers the scope and variety of our activities, there are several areas that could use a substantial increase if funds were available.

Most of our staff salary levels have not been substantially increased since start-up 5 1/2 years ago. With the current upswing in industry activity this makes recruitment and hiring very difficult, as was recently made clear, when we tried to hire an Administrator. To enable even modest cost of living increases, staffing must be altered to allow some breathing space.

As we have expanded we have taken on services that were requested and have met many needs. It is now apparent that there are some things that we cannot continue doing. Our current level of service is not sustainable and must be re-examined.

Many of our challenges are also are strengths. Our downtown location makes us accessible and relevant to the community, it also makes us very public and under a microscope. Further, it attracts an element of the local population that has caused security concerns and increased custodial duties. Because there are so many facilities and activities under one roof, there is an even greater expectation of what we should be doing.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are what management of the Centre feels are the best possible compromises to allow operations to continue.

1. Not replace office manager/administrator at this time. We have recently hired a part-time on-site bookkeeper to work exclusively on all financial aspects of Centre operations. Although there is a real need for an additional staff member to manage the day to day business of the Centre, only one candidate came forward with the required qualifications and they turned the position down. As we could realise an annual saving of over \$25,000.00, management recommends we leave this position unfilled for now.

2. Hire a regular part-time receptionist to work 10:30am to 2:30pm five days per week.
3. Reduce box office hours from 9-5 Monday to Friday to 11am to 2pm Tuesday to Saturday. Further open box office 2 hours before showtime.
4. Purchase Voice-Mail system to administer calls to Manager, Bookkeeper, Custodian and Accounting, informing clients of box office and general office hours and collecting messages. This would allow for vastly increased efficiency for Manager and ArtSpace Co-ordinator. Currently, unless there is all day support, between September and June, there is too much activity throughout the day for individuals to get their job done. It is not cost efficient for the highest paid people in the organisation to be doing entry level duties on an on-going basis. There is also not sufficient revenue earned to justify a full-time position if box office remains open all day. Many other theatres have reduced box office hours to target employees and existing buying habits more efficiently.
5. Withdraw all goodwill/profile advertising. This would include ads in newspaper publications, tourist guides, community directories. Focus exclusively on Front Row Centre and advertising related to specific events.
6. Reduce Gallery promotion and exhibit budget by 50%.
7. Maintain and expand existing fund-raising events, adding extra initiatives only if volunteers or opportunities come forward.
8. Reduce the number of commercial concerts to four and restrict them to exclusively populist entertainment. Remain open to certain opportunities that may come along where risk is minimised, but programming will be restricted to that which Management is confident will realise a profit. A further exception to this recommendation would be an event that would not return its costs except with a generous sponsorship that is forthcoming.

Although some of these recommendations will significantly alter our current operations and may generate some client dissatisfaction, we feel that properly handled, they will have the least impact on our operations than other, more draconian measures might.

# Conclusion

The North Peace Cultural Centre is one of the most unique and dynamic institutions in the province. It is a tremendous credit to the community and serves the entire service area. It must remain financially viable and proactive and operate with the vision and commitment that the community has come to expect.



## Message from the General Manager

*It has been my great pleasure and honour to be part of the North Peace Cultural Centre over the last 5 1/2 years. I feel I have grown with the community and have enjoyed the challenge of providing these services.*

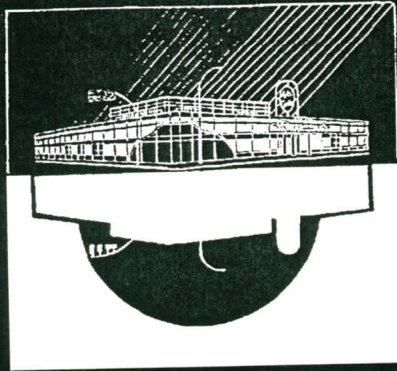
*I must however, give credit where it is due. The staff at the Centre are, as a group, the hardest working, most enthusiastic, vision driven group of people I have had the pleasure of working with. Their ability to do so much with so little is inspirational. They work hours far longer than anywhere else, and never hesitate to contribute further wherever there is a need. My hat is off to all of them!*

*A successful facility must never stand still. We have accomplished much over the last five years, not without a cost. That cost has manifested itself in not being able to generate sufficient revenue to fund all of our activities. Over the next five years it is our responsibility to continuously audit our activity to ensure both its social and fiscal return. With your support and input, we hope to maintain and expand those services that are key to our effectiveness and cut lose those that do not show any true return. However, one person's waste may be another's return, which is why it is essential that the community remain involved and vocal.*

*I look forward to hearing your feedback, and look forward to moving into the year 2000 with a strong, committed vision.*

*Jan Forsyth*





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