



Bruce Lantz photos

The skirl of bagpipes, dancing girls in tartan and, of course, the traditional haggis mark the 38th annual Robbie Burns Night held in Fort St. John, Jan. 29. More than 150 faithful Scots and others filled the Immaculata Hall to pay homage to Scotland's best-known poet, Robert Burns, and under MC Lyle Stuart the crowd got to enjoy the Rotary Pipe Band and the Heather McCracken School of Dance perform. And there was of course the traditional Address to the Haggis (a delicacy created from a sheep's stomach) by Jim Jarvis, a toast to the Bard by Andy Ackerman and to absent friends by Gerald Kennedy.

REGION

Library looks to expand

Users on the rise, officials hear; strategic plan outlined

SONYA LENNARD
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

With the number of library users on the rise, the Fort St. John Library board is looking for ways to grow — literally — in order to keep up with demand.

“We do know one thing; we need more space,” said board chair Andy Ackerman during a presentation of the board’s five-year strategic plan earlier this week.

Representatives from Fort St. John and Taylor councils, as well as the Peace River Regional District attended the presentation, in which the board focused on their goals between now and 2009.

Ackerman said the board would like to see the library expand to 15,000 or 20,000 square feet, well above the 10,000 square feet it currently has. He said an expansion would allow the library to create a larger area for children, as well as a larger meeting area, in order to accommodate a growing number of library users.

In 1999, the number of register borrowers was 14,449, but in 2004, the total patron usage was up to more than 17,000. As well, last year the library had more than 400 children enrolled in the Summer Reading Program.

Ackerman said they plan to meet with the board of the North Peace Cultural Centre in order to discuss options around space.

“We have to look if we stay in this facility,” he said, adding however that moving could present its own problems, both financially regarding rent prices, and also physically because of the practical nature of the downtown location.

He said they are waiting for



Sonya Lennard photo

Fort St. John Library board chair Andy Ackerman and the library’s mascot, Bookster, settle in with some good reading in the children’s section of the library, one of the area’s the board says needs more space to offer more programming.

the final report from a Calgary consultant hired to study the library’s facilities to find possible ways to better utilize the space and also help outline what may be needed in the future.

Along with the hope to acquire more space, the board also wants to secure long-term core funding that would free them from having to approach local governments for operational funding each year.

The board is expected to present a budget proposal to Fort St. John city council Feb. 14. Ackerman said they plan on asking for an increase in funding, although he wasn’t able to give an exact figure.

In 2004 the library received \$310,000 as an operating grant from the city, as well as \$20,000 from Taylor.

The board also hopes to add to the library’s fundraising events, which currently includes the annual book sale that is organized by a volunteer group, the Friends of the Library.

Community awareness is another goal at the top of the

board’s list. Ackerman said they hope to ride the wave of renewed library focus that began with the provincial government’s recent release of their “libraries without walls” vision for B.C.

“You’ll be seeing more of the library in the community.”

Helping to expand library services into Taylor, taking part in trade fairs, and starting new programs such as “adopt a book week,” are a few of the initiatives the board is considering in order to increase the library’s presence in the area.

And “area” has become a key word for the board. Noting that 31 per cent of the library’s patrons are rural residents from outside the city, Ackerman said they wanted to reflect that in a strategic plan for the Fort St. John and Area Library.

The final area the board touches on in the plan is to improve the wages and benefits for the staff, and ensure staff and the board is provided with opportunities for professional development.

Performing Arts Festival coming

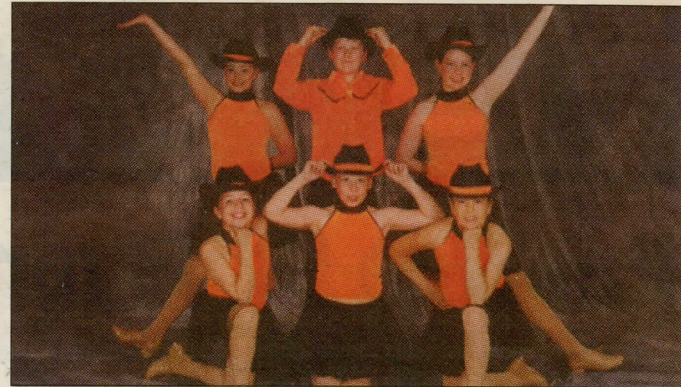
FORT ST. JOHN - Time is running out to get your entry in for the Peace River North Performing Arts Festival.

People wishing to participate in the festival must have their entries in by Feb. 5 for the dance division and by March 4 for the instrument and vocal divisions.

The 2004 Performing Arts Festival was made up of 591 entries over nine days followed by a showcase performance featuring some of the best entries from the festival. Last year the PRNF chose 11 young people to represent the north at the provincial level as well as choosing four non-competitors who were able

to attend workshops and further develop their skills.

The 2005 Performing Arts Festival will be held April 7 - 16 at the North Peace Cultural Centre. Contact Janice Closson at 785-4476 (days) and 785-3731 (evenings) for more information about this year's festival.



There'll be talent galore at the Performing Arts Festival.



Photo by Paul Frey

Dave and Angela Lamothe work on a carving of a guardian angel on Saturday during the High on Ice amateur ice carving competition. Dave was one of several winners of a random draw for prizes in both the amateur snow and ice competition. For more photos of weekend events, see page 9.

Fort St. John throws winter party

Paul Frey
 Northerner Reporter

The Energetic City lived up to its moniker on the weekend with the 2005 edition of the High On Ice Winter Carnival. Whether it was the charity funspiel benefitting the SPCA, the Northland Trailblazers Snowmobile Club's show and shine or the snow and ice sculpting events, there were plenty of activities to keep people busy all weekend.

"We have a bit of a tradition in this community of

starting things off in small bite-sized pieces and building on them and working on them over time, so that they gain a life of their own," said Mayor Steve Thorlakson in welcoming everyone to the event on Friday night. "It's because of the volunteers . . . and the dedicated city staff that make everything happen."

Peter Vandergugten, co-chairman of the city's Winter Lights Committee, echoed that view.

"We all know that volunteers . . . are just absolutely

priceless," he said, adding that without the support fellow councillors and Thorlakson showed for his ideas, the projects wouldn't have gotten off the ground.

Vandergugten also acknowledged the support shown to the carving events by former Fort St. John resident Peter Vogelaar, who has given countless hours to the event, leading workshops and helping amateur carvers.

Coun. Karen Simpson, also a co-chair of the Winter Lights Committee, said she has been an enthusiastic sup-

porter of all the winter and summer activities that have helped Fort St. John live up to its nickname.

"Whatever we do, we blow everyone away with our enthusiasm. We are a happening place."

Thorlakson echoed his council colleagues in thanking the numerous sponsors that helped make the event a reality.

"Without that (sponsorship), these kinds of events would not be possible," he said.

A total of seven teams

took part in the professional ice sculpting competition including three international teams. The Fort St. John event is the only National Ice Carving Association sanctioned event in B.C. and one of only three across Canada.

Numerous prizes were handed out to both amateur and professional carvers as a result of the brilliant sculptures created from snow and ice.

See page 5 & 9 for more photos...

Needlearts guild has lots to offer

By Rosaleen Ward

FORT ST. JOHN - In Fort St. John, a small but creative group of women meet monthly at the Northern Lights College to explore the world of needleart. Since 1991, many fingers have worked exquisite projects using an array of needles and threads.

Over the years they have benefited from workshops in silk ribbon embroi-

dery, hardanger, tatting and Brazilian embroidery.

The \$45 North Peace Needlearts Guild (NPNG) membership fee also includes membership to the Embroidery Association of Canada (EAC), which produces a monthly magazine full of projects and reports on guild activities across Canada. As well, the members are able to take advantage of individual and group correspondence courses offered by the EAC.

Participation in workshops and courses is up to each individual member and is entirely voluntary. Recently, three members completed a stumpwork course. This year they will be learning the tech-

nique of patchwork embellishment whilst some members are taking the intermediate hardanger course.

Other activities within this local guild include a "Round Robin" in which a member chooses a theme to be embroidered. She does not see her original piece until each participating member has completed her allotted section.

All needleworkers are guilty of the 'UFO' - The Unfinished Object. In the Fall, members submitted a list of unfinished projects and as they triumphantly bring these completed items to a meeting, they receive a small prize and enter their name for a \$50 prize.

For those who have no experience with needleart but want to learn how to crossstitch or embroider, don't feel intimidated about coming to a meeting. The guild is a friendly, relaxed group of women very willing to help you on your way down the needleart path.

The Needlearts Guild meets the first Monday of each month at the NLC campus at 7:30 p.m. For information contact Moneca Tanner 785 4758.



North Peace Needlearts Guild members, from left, back row: Charlotte Onciul, Mary Thiessen, Rene Giesbrecht, Joyce Darnell; front: Moneca Tanner, Marnie Faherty, Arielle Faherty, Anita Anderson.

Improvements set for museum

By Shaun Thomas

FORT ST. JOHN - The Fort St. John Museum is preparing to undergo significant growth a little later this year, as North Peace Historical Society President Larry Evans said the planned expansion for the museum, as well as two other initiatives underway, look to be a go.

"We expect to start on the first phase soon. We have enough in kind donations to finish the outer shell, and we hope that by the time that is complete we will have enough in kind to finish the inside," said Evans, speaking at the society's AGM on February 23.

"It's been a long time coming."

The new expansion will double the floor space of the current museum, and provide space for the walk-in cooler that the society has been in possession of for quite some time. The society is still looking for donations to assist with the expansion, and Evans said the hope is to have volunteers doing the construction.

As well as the expansion of the museum building itself, the historical society is restoring an old provincial police barracks to put up in their lot.

"It won't be a complete restoration because of the loss of the roof and because we had to lose some logs, but the walls will be the same...it will be as close to an exact replication as possible. We hope to have that up by the end of the year," said Evans.

Finally, the society is working on acquiring a large collection of antiquated John Deere Toys. If they are successful, they plan to take the collection of toys around to various fairs and rodeos throughout the region, as the Sunrise Rotary has donate \$9,300 towards the purchase of a trailer for the display.



EXTRAVAGANZA

contributed photo

The Northern Dance Theatre Society dancers recently went up to Fort Nelson for the 2005 Extravaganza where they did a full house show.

April 27, 2005

Arts council honoured for work

Paul Frey
Northerner Reporter

The Fort St. John Community Arts Council was honoured April 8 in Prince George with a Community Arts Champion award.

It was presented at the Assembly of B.C. Arts Council's annual conference. The award congratulates a group that advocates for arts in the community, stimulates community support for the arts and demonstrates leadership in developing community partnerships to develop arts in the community and across the province.

The FSJCAC was nominated by Heidi

Kux-Kardos of Dawson Creek for the award.

Sonja Butts, treasurer of the FSJCAC, was among a group of arts council members who accepted the award. She was ecstatic about the recognition.

"I was really proud of what we've done," she said.

"(The award) means that we're recognized provincially as leaders and movers and shakers."

Butts said the FSJCAC couldn't work as well as it does without the support of the city.

Butts said the award is an affirmation that everyone who participates in the council is doing an excellent job.

"We're visible not just here but

(throughout B.C.)," she said. "We're working hard to make our communities visible."



contributed photo

Sonja Butts (second from left), Lisa Bush and Sue Popesku of the FSJCAC accept the Community Arts Champion award from Heidi Kux-Kardos (far left).

Dancers kick off festival

SARAH YOUNG

ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

The Peace River North Performing Arts Festival had a decidedly graceful start as ballet and jazz dancers took to the stage on Thursday afternoon.

First up were the musical interpretation events, during which dancers must spontaneously choreograph their own one-minute pieces to a song they've heard only once.

"It's scary when you first do it but it's not scary for me anymore because I've done it so many times," said 17-year-old Megan Green, who participated in both the ballet and jazz musical interpretation competitions.

Each dancer hears the music only during the performance directly ahead of theirs. The person waiting backstage has to face the wall so that their own dance will be entirely

unique. It's a technical and artistic challenge, but for Green, who won first place in her age category in both the ballet and jazz events, it's just another part of doing what she loves.

"These festivals are a really good experience," she added. Green is competing in a total of 26 competitions over the course of the festival and, while she admits it's a heavy load, she's hoping it will pay off in the long term.

"I'm going to be a dancer — maybe hip hop, jazz or lyrical dance — and move to Vancouver...I'm auditioning for a company there."

As Green gets ready to take the next step in her career, a group of youngsters also getting ready for their time on stage was also going over their steps.

The Tavolha Ukrainian Dancers were showing two dances on Thursday evening, making it their

first appearance at the festival.

"It's been a lot of fun," said instructor Stephanie Bell. "This is what I grew up with so it's a real family atmosphere."

Bell added that getting the kids involved in competitions does a lot for their confidence, and the fact that it's a cultural dance form makes it that much more interesting to them.

"We get to learn Ukrainian words!" exclaimed one young dancer.

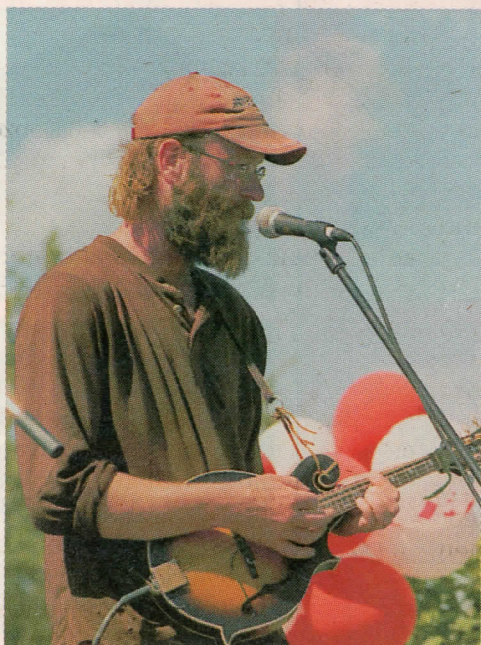
"This is a cultural dance, so the kids take it to heart," added Bell. "And when they take it to heart, they want to show it to people on stage."

The dance portion of the festival continues until April 10, followed by coal performances on April 11. Musical performances continue until April 15, with the Honours Concert at 7 p.m. on April 16.



There was lots of activities to keep the kids busy at the Canada Day festivities in Centennial Park.

Photos by Dave Thielen



The stage in Centennial Park was kept busy on Canada Day with local groups and artists performing for the crowds

Art in the Park about freedom

Paul Frey
Northerner Reporter

Getting people interested in the arts was the objective of the fourth annual *Art in the Park* celebration that was held on Friday in conjunction with the city's Canada Day festivities. The event ran from noon until 5 p.m. and included various artisans who displayed their works to children who were invited to grab a paint brush and create their own water-colour art.

Shirley Kerr, who ran the children's portion of the event, said it was a great success, due in part to the sponsors. While she expected about 300 children to try their hand at painting, closer to 500 kids actually showed up.

Kerr said the best part of the program is that it allows children to express themselves freely and creatively, using whatever colours they want.

"There's a lot of freedom in it," she said, adding that the best part of the program is that it's free.

"The beauty of this is it's free to the kids," she said.

Over at another section of the event, there were about 20 artisans displaying



Nicole Miche, 8, was just one of an estimated 500 children who painted their own works of art on Friday during Art in the Park activities.

Paul Frey photo

pottery, woodwork, all disciplines of painting and spinners and weavers. That number is about double last year's total.

Mary Braaten, coordinator of *Art in the Park*, said the event was a good way to introduce the general public to the wide array of excel-

lent artisans the North Peace has in its own backyard.

"We have such a large talent base," she said, adding that it was also a good opportunity for the artists themselves to network and compare notes. She also noted that every-

one who has a talent in a wide array of media is invited to come out and display their work.

"This is a great venue with all the other activities (going on simultaneously) to bring art into the community," she said. "We encourage everybody. We're all inclusive."

Curtain falls on ArtSpace program

Paul Frey
Northerner Reporter

The curtain fell on another year of the Summer ArtSpace Program on Friday with students enrolled in the eight-week arts camp staging Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* at the North Peace Cultural Centre theatre.

There were an average of 30 students per week taking part in the program, with 36 kids participating in the final week which was spent preparing for the show. A total of 11 students went through the entire summer-long camp.

"They did drama classes, dance classes, music classes and art classes," said Tanya Shymko, ArtSpace coordinator.

The art component included disciplines such as painting, sculpting, mask-making and drawing. Music disciplines included piano, voice and guitar work.

About 20 instructors from various disciplines helped the students learn about the arts during the summer.

Through the Looking Glass, Carroll's adaptation of *Alice In Wonderland*, gave students the opportunity to put all of the skills they learned to good use. The students made their own costumes, helped with the set design, made their own props, as well as acted and sang in the production.

"The parents are all really excited," Shymko said Friday afternoon during rehearsal for the big show. "It's a big wrap up for us because they've been here all summer and it's just right that we have something big for them to finish off with."

Six year-old Rebekah Carlson said the best part of the camp was painting. She also liked participating in the program's finale because she was able to play a different character.

"Dressing up (was the best part) because I can play," she said.

Zachary Goodley, six, also enjoyed performing on the stage. He made his own sword for his part as a knight in the production.

"I liked going into the movie theatre and playing."



Paul Frey photo

SOARING

Students at the Move Dance Studio take part in a Modern Dance routine on Friday afternoon as part of a week-long camp led by guest instructors. A total of 35 dancers were led by some of the best instructors throughout western Canada in disciplines as diverse as jazz, tap, lyrical, ballet and modern. FOR MORE ON THE SESSIONS, SEE PAGE 5.

Elves Christmas coming soon

FORT ST. JOHN - Christmas is coming early to Fort St. John.

The Fort St. John Community Arts Council is hosting the Elves Christmas Nov. 18-29. Elves Christmas includes four events: hot chocolate at the North Peace Cultural Centre; the Raising Our Voices choir concert; Christmas Karaoke/The Melancholy Wizard, and a Tree Auction.

The fundraising target is \$60,000, to go toward supporting the Arts Council's annual programming. On Nov. 18, the evening of the annual Christmas parade and light-up, residents can go to the Cultural centre for a free hot chocolate and view beautifully decorated Christmas trees, wreaths and blown glass ornaments painted by local artists that will be up for auction Nov. 29. Also that evening, Peace Gallery North will hold its annual Magical Christmas Market.

On Nov. 20, Raising Our Voices, from 7-9:30 p.m., features Unto Him, the Peace Harmony and the Goertzen Family. Admission is \$15 a person; half

price for children under 12.

Nov. 25 will feature The Melancholy Wizard by the Association for Community Living, starting at 5:30 p.m. with admission by donation. Also that day, Christmas Karaoke with a live band is from 6:30-9 p.m. There is a \$20 fee and room for 20 performances. Interested singers can get registration forms at Systems By Trail. First prize is \$250, second prize is \$150 and third prize is \$100.

Elves Christmas wraps up Nov. 29 with a Christmas Tree Auction and wine & cheese at the Quality Inn Northern Grand from 7-9 p.m. Admission is \$15 a person.

Arts Council happy with effort

By Bruce Lantz

FORT ST. JOHN - The fundraising target may have been missed but organizers are calling the Elves Christmas fundraising events put on by the Fort St. John Community Arts Council a solid success.

While all the totals aren't in yet, arts council executive director Laurie Petrucci said about half the \$60,000 target was raised from three fundraisers: the Raising Our Voices Christmas choral concert, the Christmas Karaoke event and the Christmas Tree Auction. The latter raised \$7,200.

"The \$60,000 target was if we maxed out attendance at every show and we didn't do that," said Petrucci. "But we had two excellent shows that showcased some incredible talent and the audiences thoroughly enjoyed that.

"It's not all about dollars."

But Petrucci said the tree auction was enjoyed by the 70-80 people who attended to bid on a variety of ornaments, wreaths and 10 trees decorated by local artisans and businesses.. They also got to enjoy the music of the School District 60 band.

"It was a very enjoyable evening," Petrucci said. "We had lots of fun."

As for next year, Petrucci said they aren't sure what events will be held but it's certain the arts council will again strive to raise the profile of the community's culture.

"We always want to focus on culture at this time of year," she said.

The arts council is an umbrella organization representing 23 members arts groups. In addition to the Elves Christmas events, the arts

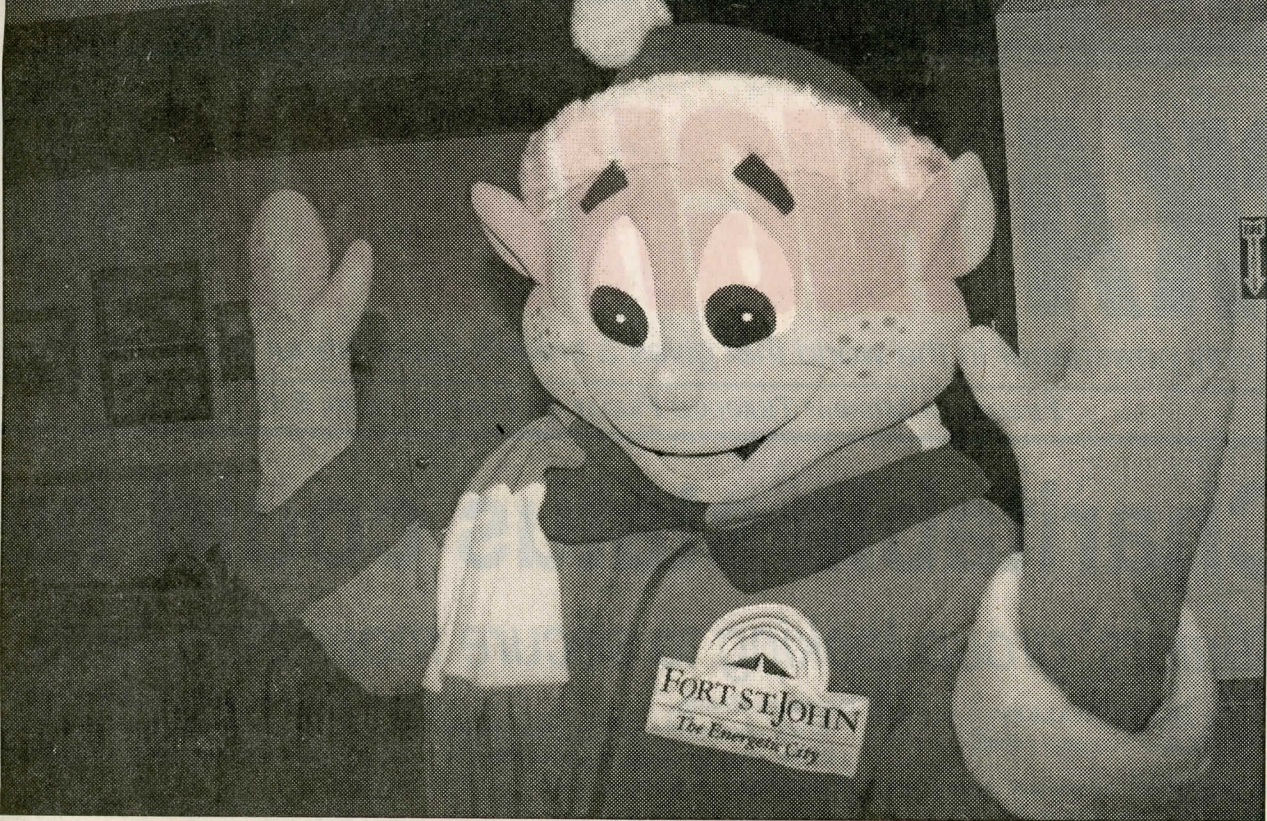


Bruce Lantz photos

From left, Dave Marshall, Dave Eaton, Dave Batterham and Laurie Petrucci view some of the ornaments on display at the Elves Christmas Tree Auction Nov. 29 at the Quality Inn Northern Grand in Fort St. John. The auction was a fundraiser for the Fort St. John Community Arts Council. Below, the School District 60 band performs for spectators at the Christmas Tree Auction.



council also organizes community programs such as the High On Ice Winter Festival and the Flower Pot Project.



MASCOT DEBUT

Dustin Walker photo

Fort St. John's new winter mascot made his debut during Monday's council meeting as Frozen John danced his way into city hall. This colourful character will make his first official public appearance at Friday's Santa Claus parade, but will also be visiting other events such as High on Ice.