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Peterborough Artsweek puts an important economic driver in the spotlight

Opinion Sep 27, 2018 Peterborough Examiner

For 51 weeks out of the year, local artists toil in obscurity, envisioning and creating exciting new work that will most likely go unseen by most.

They don't do it for money, or for fame. Most artists do what they do because they're driven to create, no matter the challenges. And they do it, largely, out of the public eye.

But that changes during Artsweek. From Friday night's big launch event, which lit up the Peterborough Public Library with a new film work from Lester Alfonso, through the following 10 days of events, Peterborough is all about the arts.

When it's over, though, the arts aren't going away. This is a good thing for our city.

Story continues below▼

Peterborough has a long tradition of embracing its arts community, and the arts community has a long tradition of embracing back.

Most Peterborough residents remember the impact David and Liz Bierk had on the local arts scene. The couple helped pioneer Artspace and laid the foundation for what would become the new Market Hall, a multi-disciplinary local arts and performance space unlike any other in the country.

Dozens of other artists live and work in the blocks surrounding Market Hall. They paint in upper-floor studios and rehearse in basement practice spaces. They show their work in quiet little galleries, some of which are literally down back alleys. Their paintings hang in local homes and cottages.

The arts aren't often mentioned in discussions of a community's economic drivers, but they should be. Many progressive politicians know this, but it should be embraced by their more traditional colleagues.

Toronto is seeing a push for this. In the midst of all the municipal election turmoil happening in the provincial capital, mayoral candidate Jennifer Keesmaat — that city's former urban planner — has pointed out that Toronto under-funds its artists, despite the arts generating an estimated \$11 billion for the city's economy each year. She pledges to double taxpayers' investment in the arts if elected.

Keesmaat was also part of the team that developed the City of Peterborough's Municipal Cultural Study Plan in 2012. City council adopted that plan, which recognized the importance of cultural assets and examined ways to build on them and integrate the arts into every sector of the city's planning.

Story continues below▼

We've seen that happen, slowly, with a series of new murals appearing in the city, and a new public sculpture planned for the library site.

This is good thinking, and shouldn't be dismissed as any kind of waste of public funds. Mayor Daryl Bennett knows this — earlier this year, he explored the idea of extending tax breaks to owners of property used by artists, something that's in place in Toronto. We need more of that kind of thinking.

Thousands of people visit Peterborough from out of town each summer for Musicfest shows — that has an impact. New exhibits at the Art Gallery of Peterborough, Gallery on the Lake, the Whetung Gallery and others attract guests to our city and county each year.

The unheralded artists working outside that spotlight form the underlying latticework that supports the arts scene most people notice (and pay to see). Artsweek puts these otherwise unheralded artists in the spotlight for a few days, and helps shine a bit of that light on them for the rest of the year.

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Peterborough Artsweek puts an important economic driver in the spotlight

Using public funds to supports arts initiatives is a good investment

Opinion Sep 27, 2018 Peterborough Examiner



Residents line up for poems from the Take-Out Poetry Cart set up in Confederation Park in Peterborough, Ont. on Monday, September 24, 2018. - Jessica Nyznik/Examiner

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