

## President's Report Northumberland Player AGM Nov. 2021.

### Greetings

Thank-you to all of you for attending. I am sure we are tired of zoom meetings and the best part of the AGM is usually the entertainment at the end and the wine and cheese, but we thought under the circumstances you would be more apt to participate if the meeting was virtual.

I want to start by saying that there are so many individuals involved in this year's activities and I am reading a shortened report. The full report with all the individuals involved will be on our website and entered into our records.

### Introduction

The period of time between Sept. 1 2020 and August 2021 marked yet another period of government restrictions and Covid protocols. I never thought that cancelling shows and activities would be so much work. Timelines were pencilled in, show slots considered and numbers calculated only to be cancelled. We wanted to make sure that the three shows we chose from the previous year would be mounted. The decision was to continue waiting until things opened up and not to plan any projects that posed a high financial risk.

Early in the year, the Board focussed its energy on financial stability; cutting costs to a minimum while planning protocols for whatever the new normal would be in theatre while continuing the marketing of our brand and finding ways to engage our patrons and members. The very successful "Memories" project launched on the website and Facebook asked members to share special experiences with the Players; a major project to share our 45 years of archival material from past shows in a digital format was started where the public can view photographs and materials; the website was kept alive by engaging the viewers with virtual performing arts events. Thank-you Val Russell, Victor Svenningson and Ian Everdell and all the contributors for keeping the Players alive online! By last fall it was evident that no performing arts company was having any indoor productions until 2022. Victoria Hall was shut down as were all local venues.

We started exploring other sources of revenue and performance venues. Bob Bailey started to plan a radio play festival. The festival would insure engagement in a safe form where writers could do a reading of their original play. We applied for the Trillium Resilient Community Fund and started thinking about mounting shows outdoors and small shows in large spaces while keeping costs to a minimum. We looked at radio shows and streaming as possibilities. Safety and engagement in the arts became our goal. Remember that at this point indoor events were restricted to 5 people. Waiting for things to get better just wasn't working. Planning as though productions would happen and cancelling meant we would be prepared for any open window. This was the beginning of the Pop Up Theatre Project: predict, plan and perform. Cancel if not safe.

It was obvious that we would not be sitting in the Firehall shoulder to shoulder or mounting an high risk expensive musical anytime soon. We were also concerned about our youth. Could we have a small, break even summer camp? I suggested a Pop Up theatre outdoor festival where we

would start off with two readings in the early summer and then transition into two short one acts in late summer and early fall. As we made plans outdoor events were restricted to 25. The Board voted yes to the project and camp only if we got the Trillium Grant because safety equipment for safe indoor activities and technical equipment for outdoor activities were required. A plan was put into place and notices prepared in case we got the grant. We received the Trillium Grant, thanks to the efforts of Board Member Sharon Anderson who filled out the application and organized the team. Victor Svenningson did the tedious job of pricing all the items needed for the projects and ordering the long list of items. The summer camp advertising and the audition process was put into motion. All the planning was based on the government regulations eventually allowing 50 people outdoors and 10 indoors by July. This was a huge leap of faith.

#### The Summer Pop Up Theatre :

The outdoor theatre festival had four titles: The Graduate directed by Jack Boyagian, Love Letters directed by Valerie Russell, Laundry and Bourbon, directed by Carol Beauchamp and Lone Star directed by Matt Blundell started rehearsing. The plan: 28 shows in total that needed to be mounted and taken down each time for a total of 56 times. We needed a safe rehearsal space and outdoor lighting equipment that was transportable. The grant money purchased over \$30k of hospital grade air scrubbers, for all three Firehall floors and both Costume House floors. We were able to purchase over \$30K of lighting equipment to allow for the outdoor festival. Tarps, indoor and outdoor hand sanitizers, disinfecting fogger, fencing were all required. We even purchased recording equipment for future streaming and promotional recordings. We needed to sell our own tickets through our own digital box office designed and managed by Ian Everdell. We needed to market all four shows. We also needed and actors and production crew and volunteers willing to show up 28 days to make it all work. It looked easy on paper! We put together Covid protocols, deliberately sold fewer tickets than the rules allowed for safety, Victor ordered all the equipment, Leslee Argue kept track of all of our spending, Lauren Russell designed the graphics, Valerie Russell and the marketing team put a plan into motion. We teamed up with the Yacht Club and the Town of Cobourg. Events coordinator, Jackie Chapman was amazing! Amazing sponsors such as Tuggs Furniture Gallery, Carstead Motor Trends and Bam Quick Bins supported the project .Marg Hilborn coordinated front of house, we put up chair and tables and built 4 sets (Frank Burns, Paul Heron, Bill Reid, John Nevin, David McTavish, David Hutzel, Jim Finan, Wayne Brander) and prepared lights and sound (Victor Svenningson and Ward McCance) ,negotiated liquor licences, permits and insurance. Most of it in June in the hopes that we possibly would have shows in July. Around 75 volunteers made it happen. We sold over 900 tickets and engaged the community in the arts during a pandemic. Now that is one amazing community theatre company!

Rebecca Rennicks and I decided the summer camp had to happen. Parents were concerned at the number of programs cancelled and the mental health of their children. The planning of the Summer Camp was no less remarkable. We hired staff and sold out 70 spots for kids ranging from all 9 to 15. Fran Martin and Jamie Finan kept track of the cohorts and the payments as Ian's box office was used for registration and fees. The new air scrubbers were in place, but at the last minute the government regulations kept the indoor capacity to 5 instead of raising it to 10. Rather

than cancel we ran two separate camps one on each floor for two weeks. We had to rotate an extra floating supervisor , but we made it work . Pivoting on the fly! The camp staff , Eden Cairns, Jamie Raymond, Cale Crowe lead by Kristy Bird was remarkable.

The Radio Summer Shorts Festival:

Bob Bailey put together a sequel sort of speak called the Summer [Radio] Shorts Festival in partnership with 89.7. The festival engaged writers and actors to flex their creative muscles when very little was going on this September. Three short radio plays were shared with the community in Sept. It seemed we had all the bases covered.

What's next :

Earlier I had mentioned that the next phase of our Pop Up Project would be small audiences and big spaces. Our first indoor pop up was *The Birds and the Bees*, directed by Lisa and Dan Kapp . Even though this was a limited capacity show (50%) it sold 1200 tickets in 9 shows at the Best Western Plus. Two married couples Neil and Kaye Torrie and Emily and Josh Graham were needed for our safety protocols in the frisky comedy. Even the directors were married.

*We Need A Little Christmas: Sounds of a Season* is a pop up fundraiser. It is a low budget show with musical director Marie Anderson. The fundraiser model asked Marie to choose and coordinate music and mount it at Victoria Hall. The Hall was closed until January 2022, but with the relaxing of Covid regulations, I went as one of the 5 arts group delegates to the town meeting to open the Hall for Christmas. The town agreed to open the Hall. Valerie Russell planned all the Covid protocols and worked with Vince Edgar to make the Hall safe. Perhaps if it is successful we can do another in spring with another group of participants.

The 2022 Partial Season:

The slide indicates that our goal is to mount our three cancelled shows plus a winter dinner theatre: *Savanah Sipping Society* directed by Cyndi Langford , shortlisted by our reading committee two years ago is the perfect choice . The Tanya Wills Quartet will do a Valentine's Day Jazz show. This is what we call a Gold Star Show which means it is a professional show we produce and pay performance fees. *All My Sons* directed by Bill Walker, *Honky Tonk Angels* directed by Valerie Russell and *You Will Remember Me* directed by Brenda Worsnop will follow.

New Building and Storage Facility:

After working out of two storage containers and storing materials in a barn we have a new space which is connected to the Campbell Street Costume House. We move in December 1<sup>st</sup>. This will be a new home for our carpenters, painters, designers and properties managers. We will be turning this 2200 sq. ft. space into an amazing addition to our creative home, the Costume House.

Thanks so much to Victor Svenningson, Jennie Ryan, Will Ryan and for all the work over the last few years to find a place.

In conclusion, I can't tell you how overwhelmed I am by the work our Board Members , Grant Coward (secretary), Leslee Argue (Treasurer), Valerie Russell (Vice-President), Sharon Anderson (Members and volunteers and Human Resource) Rebecca Rennicks (Youth Theatre Lead) , Victor Svenningson (Tech. and Safety) Bob Bailey (IT and Education) Jennie Ryan (special projects) Fran Martin (office manager) have put into what despite what some might think was far from an uneventful 12 months. I would like to thank Robert Bailey, Grant Coward and Kelly Ambrose for their contribution to the Board.

I would like to mention that Ken McDonald has retired after many years of building sets for the Players. His talents and hours of dedication will be missed. Thanks Ken.

I would also like to say how much we miss Dave and Mary Elisabeth Clark, Chris and Christine Sharp , Dawn Watters and Carlotta Rutledge who moved away without much recognition during the pandemic. Best of luck in your new adventures.

On a somber note, I am saddened by the passing of three wonderful volunteers: Laura Andrews, Cathy Nevin and John Kennedy . All three of them enriched our lives in their own special way.

Thank-you Rebecca Rennicks for organizing the AGM with the help of Leslee Argue. Thanks of course to Bob Bailey our Zoom guru for connecting us for this meeting.

As the Artistic Director, I realize we are faced with so many challenges in our society. The Northumberland Players is an amazing organization, but I know we can be better. I would like to see us rebrand the Firehall Theatre by doing more impactful shows and more Canadian shows. I know we are inclusive, but we need to find more creative ways to mount productions that will reflect our inclusivity and our willingness to share the diverse stories in our world. I will try to put into a more expansive outreach program. I look forward to our new creative space where we can meet, build and play. Thank-you for being a Player and thank you for changing lives dramatically.

