

InterAction Children's Theatre Helps Schoolchildren

By Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Little did Anne Elman realize when she started a grass-roots neighbourhood "Children's Drama Workshop" in Saint John West back in the seventies, that it would grow to encompass a registered charity, now led by her daughter, which touches hundreds of children, many from high priority neighbourhoods. Kate Elman Wilcott explains that it was supposed to be an eight month stint when she arrived back home from Halifax and took over the reins from her Mum. She had a successful career working with professional regional theatres, was a founding member of Zuppa Circus Theatre, and worked as a director, playwright, theatre administrator, consultant, and arts-educator. But she and her husband have stayed and this year the InterAction Children's Theatre (IACT), as it grew to be known, celebrates its tenth anniversary. Kate was the artistic director of SJ225's "Making History" at Harbour Station last month. She received the 2005 NB Merit Award for Excellence in Arts and Culture .

Last week IACT had the distinction of being a finalist for Performing Arts Award for Theatre and took part in a performance in "The Originals", Saint John's first Annual Arts Awards event and part of the Saint John 225 celebrations. Formed in 2001 as a Theatre Performance Company for children aged 3-18, IACT members are trained in all aspects of theatre performance, with a strong focus on creative self-expression, self-confidence, and group work. IACT 's teachers and directors are professional actors, choreographers, performers, and educators, who create a safe, fun, and energetic environment in which children feel free to create, challenge themselves, make lasting friendships, and learn.

Robin Hebb and Sarah Butler have been conducting an " IACT in My School" program for almost thirty Bayside Elementary School Grades 4 & 5 students. To date, the program has allowed over 500 school children from Greater Saint John to participate in school performances, workshops, and classroom initiatives in four schools. They love the opportunity to break from structured classes and don't quite realize they are still learning because it is such an enjoyable experience. Vice Principal Sheelah McNamara says the weekly sessions are "wonderful". The students "are blossoming", growing in self confidence and self-expression learning skills which will serve them for a lifetime. Knowledgeable educators recognize the value of the arts and drama in a young person's personal development. " The benefits of this program are overwhelming, as is the feedback we receive from parents, teachers, students, and the school community. It brings pride to the children, allows them to create in a safe and non-judgemental way, and teaches them to work hard for what they believe in.

Our students have appeared in feature films, television commercials, short films, radio and print ads, and on stages throughout the region. But most importantly, " IACT in My School" produces children who are self-confident, energetic, and develop an empathetic, understanding, and creative outlook on the world around them" adds Ms. Elman Wilcott.

With a office/rehearsal base on Bentley Street, off Douglas Avenue, the group makes good use of outdoor spaces in the park adjacent to the New Brunswick Museum and at Harbour View High during summer in addition to their winter programming and the " IACT in My School" programs.

Over 800 children have spent creative summers with IACT during the past 9 years. With fun-sounding themes, divided into three age groups, the sessions include workshops, family activities, performances and games. Day Camps for ages 4-7 include: Art Attack, July 5-9; Shakespeare in the Park! July 12-16; Active Kids: Body Mind and Imagination! July 19-23; Make a Movie Camp! July 26-30; Secret Agents and Mystery Detectives August 9-13 ; Broadway Musical Lunchbox (Dinner) Theatre! Aug. 16-20 (sessions are \$150). Production Workshops for ages 8-15 are: Shakespeare in the Park July 5-17 ; Film Making Camp! July 19-30 (Broadway Mystery Dinner Theatre August 9- 20th); (sessions are \$300/2 weeks and each includes a special performance). For \$150, teens can sign on for "Theatre as Leadership: An Session Intensive for Teens! June 28th, 29-30, plus one week summer workshop assistance-ship.

This Wednesday June 16, 10:45am, at the Business Resource Centre, 40 King St. the Greater Saint John Community Foundation is celebrating Saint John's and Rothesay's anniversaries and arts and culture by announcing their Anniversary Grant of \$30,000 and over \$200,000 in 44 other grants, many in the arts and culture field. The public is welcome to attend. The Children's Interaction Theatre's My School program will be among those receiving support.

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Photo: Kate Elman Wilcott, Artistic/Education Director of InterAction Children's Theatre demonstrates how to get involved in theatre performance to Jared Shipley, Paige Hachey and Chloe Barsalou, Bayside Elementary School students who participate in the " IACT in My School" program in four Saint John schools.

Photo by Peter Walsh/Telegraph-Journal



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880, sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca