

Behind The Scenes with "Ovation" Volunteers

by Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

Saint John is having its share of major events and fundraisers this year, especially with the added excitement of 2010 celebrations. Our area is living up to its new distinction of being one of Canada's Cultural Capitals. Such enjoyable events are a pleasure and wonder to attend but often belie the complexity and hard work in planning and execution that take place behind the scenes.

The Saint John Volunteer Centre held its Volunteer Expo on Oct. 22 in Brunswick Square to an appreciative and participatory audience, its goal being to encourage volunteerism in our community. Many agencies were there to encourage and sign up new helpers for their many causes. It prompted reflection on the number of volunteers involved in one upcoming event, "Ovation" on Nov. 6, which is attracting upwards of well over one hundred volunteers to celebrate community anniversaries, arts & culture and benefit the charities supported by the Greater Saint John Community Foundation.

It requires, energy, commitment and organizational skills to bring a team of skilled and experienced volunteers together and also to pass on that spirit to young people who will take over in years to come. The Ovation team, led by Penny Milligan, Chair, is organized into six sub-committees, each with their own distinct roles. Coordinating and keeping tabs on so many takes a lot of time, energy and resources. Milligan has a family at home, her first priority, as well as businesses in which she and her husband take lead positions. The MBA grad with boundless energy and enthusiasm has an outgoing personality and experience in other fundraisers like "Divine Divas".

Soliciting sponsorships is another important aspect of preparing for an event and usually takes personal contacts and many hours of careful follow-up. Milligan and Cheryl Robertson, Foundation Chair, took lead roles in meeting key sponsor organizations and personalities like the Telegraph Journal, AVW-TELAV, Delta Brunswick, W. Smith and Company, Fine Jewellers, Katherine Bacon, realtor, the Saint John Port Authority and Honorary Chair James C. Irving. Milligan is proud of the work of Judy Graham and her team of Auction Committee volunteers, who have personally contributed, along with generous solicitations from individuals and community businesses, over one hundred amazing live and silent auction experiences and gifts.

Logistics is an unseen element of any successful event and with Charlene Hayes in charge, things have gone forward smoothly. The Saint John Port Authority's Marco Polo Cruise Terminal is Ovation's venue times two, with the main building and vendors' tent as sites of festivities. Not normally open to locals, the tent as the main entrance, and now dubbed the "Starlight Pavilion", will be a new experience for many in our community. Ovation attendees will see it transformed into a fairy wonderland of twinkling lights overhead as they stroll by delectable food and drinks, view exhibits, art and entertainment on their way to the Main Terminal Building. For this volunteer sub-committee it means finding vehicles, transporting lights, chairs, tables, coat racks, sound systems and displays to both Port locations. Saint John High and St. Malachy's students will be part of the volunteer team, assisting with greeting, setup, tickets and coat check.

With a purpose-built facility like the Cruise Terminal, such items as a stage and display areas need to be constructed. Thanks to generous sponsor Sancton Access, these are to be constructed of scaffolding on site and later dismantled, needing careful coordination. This was the avant garde suggestion of professional artist Suzanne Hill, whose artist colleagues, along with the Saint John Art Club, are being carefully included into the evening's theme of Arts and Culture.

In order for guests to hear renowned pianist Ludmila Knezkova-Hussey it means the generous loan of a grand piano and moving it with care and tuning, not to mention borrowing the services of CAT Rentals for an electric boom to decorate the 35ft. ceilings, with the help of Patrick Sohy, Kim Legge and her Committee.

Rhonda Cusack and Sylvia Logan are just two of the volunteers involved in work with artistic performers for Ovation. Some twenty groups of musicians, dancers and performers will entertain on two stages (the Starlight Pavilion and Cruise Terminal Building) from 7-11pm on Nov. 6. Costas Halavrezos, known for his long-time association with CBC's Maritime Noon, will be coming home to emcee the evening, and lending his talents.

Under the watchful eye of Coleen Carson and her volunteers, all accounting, bookkeeping records and charitable receipts will be coordinated with the Community Foundation, which is also helping with communications support, another key element.

No event can be complete without an audience and that's where Ruth Pearn and her team of ticket promoters come in. With a wealth of activities abroad, they are doing their utmost to promote sales for the fundraiser. Tickets can be obtained at the Foundation office , 40 King St., 672-8880, KV Drugs or Guardian Drugs in Grand Bay-Westfield.



Photo: "Ovation" - A Gala Evening celebrating 2010 anniversaries and arts and culture takes place Nov. 6 at the Marco Polo Cruise Terminal. Pictured are: (back) Gordon Hendry, AVW-TELAV, Paula Small, Saint John Port Authority and Penny Milligan, volunteer Ovation Chair and (front) volunteers Kim Legge, Rhonda Cusack and Sylvia Logan.



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 sjfoundation@nb.aibn.com, 506-672-8880.

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