

North Perth artists finding new ways to create during COVID-19 pandemic

Mayor Todd Kasenberg encourages residents to share creativity

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Some of North Perth's most creative residents have had their opportunities to work, create and perform stifled by the emergency orders which have been in place across Ontario since the middle of March.

Mayor Todd Kasenberg hopes the ArtsConnection on Northperth.ca can help shine a light on the local arts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He has been immersed in the arts for his entire life – both of his parents were musicians.

"I have maintained it's the arts that rise us above the level of beasts," said Kasenberg.

A few weeks into the pandemic period, he was cooking and listening to music.

"I was dancing around the kitchen and it dawned on me that music can bring us joy in times of happiness and in times of sorrow," said Kasenberg.

He thought about how visual and performing arts can inject some much-needed joy into the community, and he realized there is a local talent base who may be interested in sharing their art.

"I did a broad call and we've had some lovely responses which we've posted," said Kasenberg. "I'd love to see a lot more though. I'd love to see the art of our young citizens showing up in the initiative."

He hopes after the COVID-19 situation is resolved there can be a room at the municipal office where some of the artwork could be exhibited for people to see, touch and participate in if it's musical.

Kasenberg is looking for suggestions about how art can be integrated into the local recovery when things are able to open up more. One idea of his own comes from a festival he saw when he was visiting Somerville, Massachusetts. It was called Porch Fest.

"Literally you walk through neighbourhoods and there are old beautiful homes and, on the porches, they have musicians of various ilk," he said. "There were probably about 30 musicians participating and it was a wonderful day. We enjoyed it immensely. We saw gospel, hard rock, country, bluegrass."

He believes something like that could be a positive part of recovery for North Perth.

Johnny Borton, a local musician whose income has been hit hard by the pandemic, had a similar idea which would incorporate driveways.

"COVID-19 has destroyed everything for me," said Borton.



Colin Burrowes Photo

MASKED MUSICIAN – Local musician Erik Begg is one of many artists who have had to find new creative outlets since COVID-19 restrictions have cancelled most arts and entertainment events.

He had 78 bookings going right into the summer and then his schedule started getting hit with cancellations. In all, he said he lost \$8,000 worth of income.

Most of his shows were going to be at long-term care homes.

2020 was looking to be the first year Borton's income was going to be almost completely based on music. Now, for the first time since he started playing music in 1978 his ability to book live events has been completely taken away.

"Do you lay down and die? No," he said. "You've got to think outside the box to make ends meet."

Borton wants to play socially-distanced block parties as soon as he can. He plans to set his piano up in a driveway, by request, and play for the people throughout a neighbourhood.

"Be smart about it," he said. "Don't push the enve-

lope because if somebody does something they're not supposed to do, we don't want to be headline news."

He is not planning to charge for these performances. He just wants to comfort people with music.

The prospect of online performances is not something Borton is excited by.

"People need to be together for live music," he said. "I need the energy coming back at me. I feed off the crowd. If the crowd is getting into it that gets me pumped up."

Kasenberg wants to do something which will renew the understanding of arts in the community.

"This is not to say arts aren't well represented here," he said. "We have an arts council which does a good job but like so many grassroots organizations they don't have a lot of money."

Without a lot of money, Kasenberg acknowledged

it is tough to market and draw attention to the local arts, so he is trying to bolster the local arts scene through initiatives like the ArtsConnection.

Gary Moon, founding member of the North Perth Arts and Culture Council, said COVID-19 has forced the council to put all activities on hold.

It was lucky enough to have its Paddyfest events completed before they started getting cancelled, but its annual general meeting is postponed and with the North Perth Public Library closed, its ongoing monthly artist display is also on hold.

He said even though they can't get out to do the art they want to; local artists are still being inspired and the arts council is posting creative ideas and positive thoughts about art in general at www.northpertharts.com and on its Facebook page. There are also at least

20 videos from local artists showing samples of their work, and he promised there is more to come.

One council member, Megan Myke, has been doing online painting lessons from her home.

"I wanted to give back to the community in these uncertain times with something that could break up people's day if they are stuck at home so they can have a creative outlet," said Myke. "Just trying to shine some positivity into their day and get their mind off whatever is bothering them."

She also thought offering lessons online for free would give people the opportunity to try something new without pressure on them.

"Sometimes people are hesitant to come out to lessons because of cost or maybe they are uncomfortable painting around other people," she said. "This idea is nice because you are in the comfort of your own home."

Kasenberg has been encouraging artists to contact him at toddkasenberg@northperth.ca with ideas for art installations they might be able to do and still maintain physical distancing.

"I'd be happy to take a list at this point so that we could nudge that agenda along a little bit and see if we can pull something off," he said.

Kasenberg noted that he will not only be known as the COVID mayor but also the mayor who had Paddyfest cancelled on his watch.

"That's not a happy thing to have happen in this community but if we can get a Canada Day, that's still yet to be determined, I think it will be an important community celebration and I think we need to start thinking about how we do some of those celebrations differently," he said. "Even if restrictions are still in place as we come to the end of June and into the Canada Day period, I know the Atwood Lions are committed to doing something, even if it's just driving a truck down Main Street with some balloons on it – a parade of one."

Kasenberg feels as a community, we need some celebrations at this time.

"I am very hopeful we can spin up some new angles and new approaches if we must or bolt on some new types of activities to enhance our celebrations as we move through the rest of 2020," he said.

Local musician, Erik Begg, had two words for the effect COVID-19 has had on his music.

"It sucks," he said. Begg plays in two bands, Wiggler and Stand Against Fear. Both bands had several shows cancelled, and plans to play festivals and tour in the summer have had to be put aside.

"This may be the new normal," he said. "It's going to be a long time before we get venues back."

COVID-19 hasn't forced him to give up on his music completely though. In fact, he is keeping himself busy.

FEATURE

"With Wiggler, our bass player has shot a few videos playing the upright bass," Begg said. "I hook them up to my PA system and set up a camera so I can get Dave in the shot on my laptop and I play guitar and some kick pedals for the drums, so we're able to put together some virtual show videos there."

On top of that he has actually started a new band. Through the shared boredom of isolation, he started a project with other Ontario musicians called Bridge Street Hooligans. Everyone plays their own part from the comfort of their own home and Begg mixes the tracks together.

"We might never play a note together in person but putting together a virtual band for now is pretty cool," he said.

Begg said that the low payout from online streaming services has made it so live shows and merchandise sales at them have become a main source of income for many musicians, so it's rough for musicians to not be able to play concerts.

"Do you lay down and die? No. You've got to think outside the box to make ends meet."

– Johnny Borton
Local musician

"It's the t-shirt sales after the show where you have that face-to-face experience when you're both covered in sweat, you're both still excited and they say, 'man, that was awesome'... that's the thing we're missing right now," he said. "You don't have that direct connection right now. I don't know how that is going to fill in. You lose that tangibility with online sales."

Tyler Schaefer said he was hesitant to post his videos online. Art and singing are just hobbies but he became involved with the ArtsConnection because he supports what Kasenberg is proposing. Schaefer considers himself more of a supporter of local arts than an artist so he was sharing some of his own videos on the ArtsConnection to help get it going.

"What the mayor is doing is trying to engage different sectors of the community and I think that's really cool," he said.

Arts may be a hobby for Schaefer but education is his passion. Teaching, like most other jobs, has had to adapt to the COVID-19 situation and he said online classes are not the same. He misses teaching in person.

As it did for the rest of the world, COVID-19 made everything come to a screaming stop for Jevon Coxon.

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Contributed Photos
SPRING WINGS – Oranges are a popular attractant for orioles; North Perth's Murray and Audrey Krotz were pleased to see some drop by recently for a visit along with some indigo buntings to their RR 1 Gowanstown property.

POLICE NEWS

Man attempts to fill fraudulent prescription, leads to foot chase with police in Listowel

LISTOWEL – One person is facing a number of charges after an incident at a Listowel business on May 13. Last Wednesday, the Perth County Ontario Provincial Police were called to a pharmacy on Mitchell Road South, in the Municipality of North Perth, after a suspect attempted to use a

fraudulent prescription. The suspect had left the scene, but attended a different pharmacy nearby where police caught up with him. Upon seeing police, the suspect fled out the back door of the business, leading police on a foot chase. The suspect was located on the North Perth trail and arrested.

As a result, Christopher Lougheed, 41, of Kitchener, has been charged with: Use, deals, acts on forged document; possession of a forged document with intent; resist a peace officer; identity theft – obtain or possess another person's identity information; personation with

intent to avoid arrest, prosecution, or obstruct justice (identity fraud); and failure to comply with release order. The accused has been released from custody and is scheduled to appear at the Ontario Court of Justice in Stratford at a later date to answer to the charges.

Arts scene adjusts to COVID-19 era

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“The first couple of months of the year started out really well for me personally because I had just launched a new band, On the Fly, and we had bookings up until the end of July,” he said. “As of now they have all been cancelled.”

Coxon said in his experience, these gigs would have led to more offers through the spring and his schedule would have filled up, but that can't happen with the current restrictions.

“It would have been my first time playing at the Kincardine Blues Festival and that has been cancelled completely,” he said.

Given time, he thinks the entertainment industry will adapt, but in the meantime, it's going to be a tough go for many people. He said it's very good that the government put in place the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit.

“It's legit – it needs to be there for people,” said Coxon.

Despite what he hears some people say about musicians, Coxon said most of them are not living a rockstar lifestyle, it's working to pay the bills.

“The money these people are making at these festivals isn't to buy a new lawnmower, it's to pay their rent in a lot of cases, and right now we have no end date,” he said.

Back Alley Studio is Coxon's base of operations, but giving music lessons shut down when schools closed in the days before March Break. He's playing it by ear and hoping to go back

when schools do.

He said many other musicians have moved their lessons online but it's not something he wants to do.

“The longer this draws out, for sure, I'm going to have to adapt,” said Coxon. “It's becoming clear we're all going to have to adapt in our everyday lives but personally I'm intimidated by online lessons. I'd rather be one-on-one with someone.”

Not only was the beginning of the year going well for On the Fly, Coxon had just accepted a spot in a high-level Leonard Cohen tribute band based out of Haliburton.

“When I accepted the first booking was to be in October so it still stands at this point,” he said.

Preparation for that show has ground to a halt, so Coxon wonders whether it will end up being cancelled anyway.

“When is the next time people are going to want to gather in a theatre to watch a show?” he asked.

He remains optimistic that when things open up he will get back to work, but he figures it might be in a modified way.

“I've seen people talk about overpaid musicians and actors, but I think right now would really be a terrible time if people couldn't turn on their TV and watch a movie or listen to music because it was never there. I'm thankful for it every moment of my life. Sometimes people kind of forget how lucky we are to have it so easily,” said Coxon.

SUDOKU

PUZZLE NO. 769

				3	5		7	8
		7	2	4		6	5	9
8	9	5		7			2	
	2			8				
5	3	9		6				
						3	6	
	5	8	1					7
		2	7					
			8			5	9	

LEVEL: BEGINNER

HOW TO PLAY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.

Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: you must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column or 3x3 box.

ANSWER TO PUZZLE NO. 768

8	7	3	5	6	4	1	2	9
1	9	2	7	8	6	9	3	4
6	9	4	2	3	1	5	8	7
1	4	7	8	9	6	8	3	5
2	6	5	2	3	9	7	8	1
4	7	8	2	7	3	6	1	4
5	9	6	2	7	3	8	1	4
3	1	9	6	9	6	9	2	5
7	6	4	3	5	9	1	8	2
2	8	5	7	1	4	6	9	3

CROSSWORD

PUZZLE NO. 33

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12				13				14			
15				16				17			
18				19			20	21			
				22		23	24				
25	26	27	28			29			30	31	32
33				34				35			
36				37				38			
				39				40			
41	42	43				44		45	46	47	48
49						50	51	52		53	
54						55				56	
57						58				59	

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ACROSS

- In this way
- Appealed
- Cooking fuel
- Monthly expense
- Take to the trail
- Have being
- Nurse's _____
- Unzip
- Neckline shape
- On time
- Say
- Derby or coaster
- Rice field
- Kind of spray can

DOWN

- Look for
- Meddle
- Narrative writing
- Actress Dern
- Relay section
- Safety _____
- Highest card
- Morning droplets
- Laundry machine
- Miss Piggy, e.g.
- "_____ to Joy"
- Small boy
- Periodical
- Nail polish
- Realize
- Casper, e.g.
- Defrost
- Minute amount
- Acted like
- Slant
- Nutmeglike spice
- Sound return
- "_____ Came Bronson"
- Bunyan's tool
- Strong desire

ANSWER TO PUZZLE NO. 32

D	E	S		S	E	D		T	E	E
N				R	I	C	E		O	P
N				E	A	R	N			
O				I	R	I	E		L	I
S				T	R	I	O		I	N
P									P	R
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CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWERS USE AMERICAN SPELLING