

Arts & Culture:

a significant driver for economic and creative growth

A progress report from the Institute on arts & culture development
in Southern Georgian Bay.



Photo Credit: Judy Morrison

September 19, 2019. On a beautiful evening last September, over 60 people, from all walks of life, gathered in the Marsh Street Centre, Clarksburg, to learn more about and discuss the important impact Arts & Culture have on our lives. Arts & Culture: a significant driver for economic growth and creative and healthy regions was the topic for the launch of the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay's www.tisgb.com 2019 Speaker Series. The Institute's work focusses on harnessing the power of people and place in Southern Georgian Bay to be the smartest, greenest, healthiest, and most caring region in Ontario.

We acknowledge with gratitude, lead partners for the event:
Blue Mountain Foundation for the Arts www.bmfa.on.ca

and media partner On the Bay Magazine
www.onthebaymagazine.com. Marsh Street Centre
www.marshstreetcentre.com and The Cheese Gallery
www.thecheesegallery.ca also supported the event.


the **institute**
of southern georgian bay

Background

For a community of close to 100,00 persons, our region enjoys one of the largest concentrations of artists in Ontario. Considered by many as one of the most important sectors for building a vibrant and identifiable Southern Georgian Bay, we have seen that arts and culture binds us together. From wood turners to painters and photographers, from sculptors to ceramic and textile artists, from jewellery designers to actors, musicians, dancers, improv artists and writers, these remarkably talented people capture the beauty of our natural environment, share our stories with one another, reflect our history, and inspire us in so many ways.

Municipal boundaries are not barriers for artists as shows are mounted in galleries, public spaces, halls, theatres, and arts centres situated in Meaford, The Blue Mountains, Collingwood, Clearview, and Wasaga. The work is created, gathered, and presented from artists located in towns, settlements and rural areas across the region.

Many great arts, culture, dining, and entertainment success stories exist across our region including: Blue Mountain Village, the Apple Pie Trail, Theatre Collingwood, Blue Mountain Foundation for the Arts, Butter Gallery, Meaford Hall & Cultural Centre, Matilda Swanson Gallery and other Clarksburg/Thornbury art galleries, 65 Simcoe Street, the Marsh Street Centre, and the South Georgian Bay Music Foundation.

The arts and culture sector is increasingly recognized in many studies as a key factor in economic development, including its multiplier effect which enhances economic activity for many other businesses. Richard and Anke Lex are entrepreneurs based in Collingwood who are focused on community building and the arts. Rick is quoted in On the Bay Magazine saying:

"Studies show that arts and culture tourists tend to spend the most money in a community. They go out for dinners to independent restaurants, they shop at independent retailers, they spend more time in the town."

Embracing our arts community also helps to brand our communities and create civic pride. The Creative City Network of Canada www.creativecity.ca has

commissioned a number of papers in this field. One is entitled "Building Community Identity and Pride". This paper opens with the following thought:

"The arts have been instrumental in facilitating social cohesion, bringing tourism to unlikely places, fostering a sense of belonging, and preserving collective memory."

Recognizing the potential return on investment in the sector, Arts & Culture was featured as one of seven themes of the Community Innovation Day held by the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay in 2018. Over 90 participants, many of whom might not have otherwise explored the potential of this sector, identified important steps for developing a deeper "infrastructure" for it. The priorities included:

- a) Developing a common brand through a regional arts and culture working group,
- b) Developing a regional digital marketing strategy and website,
- c) Creating a collaborative headliner event, and
- d) Develop a regional centre for the arts.

The stage was set for a follow-up discussion.

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A significant driver for economic growth and creative and healthy regions

September 19, 2019, Marsh Street Centre, Clarksburg

Summary and Highlights

As MC for the evening, Bill Anderson, radio host on **The New Classical FM**, originating from **102.9 FM** in Collingwood, welcomed everyone on behalf of the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay, Blue Mountains Foundation for the Arts, and media sponsor **On the Bay Magazine**.

Bill emphasized that this important area of our lives not only contributes to local economies - jobs, restaurants, and tourism - but also impacts other important areas of our lives such as creativity and innovation in our towns and overall health and wellbeing. He introduced the distinguished group of panellists from across the region, who shared their knowledge and stories about the growing place-making movement, the role Arts & Culture plays in their communities, and critical elements of strong cultural strategies.





STUART REID (Panel Moderator) Independent arts professional and community philanthropy leader.

Stuart opened the discussion by sharing data points from the Community Foundations of Canada's www.communityfoundations.ca Arts & Belonging Vital Signs Report:

- 77% of Canadians agree or strongly agree that arts experiences help people feel part of their local community. This is especially true for newcomers and people in minority-language communities.
- Canadians who regularly attend live music, have a stronger sense of belonging to their city or town.
- Canadians who rate arts, culture, and leisure in their community as "excellent" are nearly three times more likely to report a very strong sense of belonging.

Stuart encouraged us to think from a perspective of abundance rather than scarcity. He noted that rural communities are sometimes framed in a negative way about what they lack. He asked us to consider positive things that we are grateful for - the natural wonders of our landscape, abundance of beautiful fresh water, Indigenous culture and heritage, the history of our land which is so fascinating. He also highlighted the uniqueness of agriculture in our region, the growing artisanal craftsmanship, interest in local food production and the initiatives popping up all over the place about how we engage with our environment.



SANDRA DUPRET, Vice President of Student Experience, Fleming College and Haliburton School of Art + Design

Sandra shared the story of the Haliburton School of Art + Design www.flemingcollege.ca/school/haliburton-school-of-art-and-design which began 53 years ago. Six determined champions, who were involved in a small art gallery in Haliburton saw the need and the opportunity to present

art courses, taking advantage of the beautiful natural landscape. They imagined inviting people from cities and other towns to learn about painting in colours and styles reminiscent of the famous Group of Seven.

These champions approached Fleming College www.flemingcollege.ca in Peterborough with this idea. The recently formed College accepted their proposal and the school started with 14 students. Slowly over the years, this small summer school program grew into a robust summer school program and then to an expanded to a college program offering courses to full-time students. At its height, 3,600 students attended over a 6-week period. Annual numbers have levelled off at about 2,400 summer students with about 100 to 150 full-time students during the winter.

These numbers are key to illustrating the economic impact of the school. With this number of students, a large investment is made by the provincial government and the college, which provides opportunities for businesses in Haliburton to expand and to stay functional throughout the year.

The School attracts faculty from across the country, in particular from Nova Scotia and Ontario. And, the school is the key for bringing younger people into the community who choose to stay and work there. The school has developed many partnerships in the area to nurture their creative community. Fifteen years ago, local residents spearheaded activity which resulted in a major investment in a new campus made by both the provincial and municipal governments.

Since then, the School has continued to collect data to effectively showcase the economic impact of arts in the community. More recently, community members promoted the idea of a cultural mapping plan process to the Town Council. The outcome was the development of a formal sub-committee of Council for all the arts and the development of a 10 year Arts & Culture plan.



JOHN HARTMAN, visual artist and Chair of the Midland Cultural Centre

John is a celebrated Canadian artist www.johnhartman.ca/about.php who understands place-making and captures the essence and beauty of Georgian Bay in his paintings. He spoke about the importance of arts and culture to the area of Midland, the remarkable gift of one philanthropist, and the

need for dedicated space to support artists and arts organizations.

Midland Cultural Centre www.midlandculturalcentre.com is located in downtown Midland and is a modern, architecturally unique facility which combines performing arts, visual arts, theatre, community programming and a restaurant. Annually, over 75,000 visitors attend festivals, concerts, art classes, exhibitions, or meet up for lunch. It provides space for three major arts organizations —

Quest Art School + Gallery, Huronia Players, a community theatre group, and Café Roxy. A vibrant group of Volunteer Ambassadors play important roles including box office, ushering, front of house, and stage set-up.

John spoke about the history of the area surrounding Midland and how the Centre provides an important anchor as a place that can share the stories of the surrounding communities, the heritage of the area, and the unique Indigenous and settler cultures that continue to evolve.

He also highlighted the role of philanthropy in the creation of the Centre. Philanthropist Reinhart Weber, through the Weber Foundation, provided 95% of the \$11 million locally funded construction costs. Research, focus groups and studies were undertaken to underscore the need for a facility to support artistic and cultural expression in the area.



DEAN HOLLIN, singer, actor, radio host, and Theatre Director for the Marsh Street Centre

Dean www.deanhollin.com has worked in the Southern Georgian Bay area for decades and understands the challenges faced by artists as well as the role they play in reflecting the stories of communities across the province.

He underscored the important role that provincial funding provided in the development of Ontario's theatre community. In the last quarter of the last century, theatres were active in many smaller communities, and provided the magnet to attract other businesses to these communities. The economic impact of the arts for these communities helped them flourish.

The network of theatres that developed, spawned the growth of many artists, playwrights, musicians, and Ontario's theatre industry, where so many professional artists got their start.

He spoke about the growing collaboration of theatres in Southern Georgian Bay now and how important that is to nurture. Artists have always been resourceful when it comes to finding and utilizing resources and he talked about how investment in the arts produces economic results many times over.

Dean asked the audience to look around at the Marsh Street Centre, an architectural gem located in the village of Clarksburg. It is operated as a community-owned non-profit organization, with a charitable registration number, and is managed by a small group of dedicated volunteers. It presents concerts, theatre performances, community programming, and workshops, and supports its programming and maintenance through space rentals.

Dean emphasized how the impact of these facilities is enhanced by the volunteers who help make them run and the partnerships created with other businesses, which increase the economic activity. He underscored the growing audience base and the opportunity to think about how we collectively take the opportunity of creating a Regional Arts Strategy to enhance outcomes for our area by thinking strategically and working together.



ERICA ANGUS, Executive Director, Theatre Collingwood

Erica is a producer and administrator with a background in marketing and collaborating with hoteliers, restaurants, and the arts community to develop tourism strategies. She spoke about the incredible talent in the area, the supportive audience base, and the need for thinking about new ways to address the need for permanent arts facilities. She highlighted the reality of

diverse interests in the community for municipal investment, but underscored the fact that investing in a diverse range of services, including sports, arts, health and wellbeing, can provide opportunities for the next generation to grow and can enhance creativity and innovation in communities.

Theatre Collingwood www.theatrecollingwood.ca is a not-for-profit professional theatre company, with a charitable registration number, created in 1984. It has over 5000 subscribers, showcased over 10 productions in 2019, and presents some of Canada's most talented performers while fostering relationships with regional artists and other regional theatre companies.

Erica shared the challenges of not having control over available and affordable performance space, and the increasing rental costs that theatre companies are facing. She spoke about how innovative artists and arts groups can be, sharing the story of Theatre Collingwood's recent use of a variety of new spaces, but underscored that without stabilization and investment in the arts ecosystem, it was not sustainable.

Audience Discussion

Following the panel, there was a lively Q & A and the audience expressed comments, ideas, and suggestions, towards developing a regional arts strategy for Southern Georgian Bay. The discussion focussed on two major themes: the importance of creating cultural destinations and how a regional arts strategy leverages impact. Participants from the town of Midland shared their remarkable journey of creating and funding the Midland Cultural Alliance www.culturealliance.ca

The energy in the room was high and people committed to ensuring that next steps were taken. The evening concluded with the raffling of a finely crafted bowl by woodturner, Don May.

Top 10 audience recommendations

1. Establish a follow-up meeting to continue to build relationships. There seems to be a consensus that we have the opportunity to be stronger together.
2. Gather arts, business, and government leaders, as well as philanthropists to contribute to the shaping of the strategy and include it in all the municipalities Economic Development planning.
3. Conduct fan-tours for Council members and municipal staff department heads. Consider the changes to Development Charge and the concerns of how they may be allocated. Make connections with the emerging Midland Cultural Alliance being supported by multiple municipalities.
4. Establish a much-needed Regional Professional Network to discuss exchange of programs and promotion, development of local statistics (aggregate) to build the business case. Keep it local. Include librarians especially those that are GLAMS (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) such as Blue Mountain's public library.
5. Create a cultural mapping process to identify assets and

underscore gaps. Learn from the Midland and North Simcoe experience.

6. Ensure that ideas expressed, including a regional arts council and regional arts centre be explored.
7. Get all the municipal councils behind the idea of creating a Regional Arts Strategy and contribute funds.
8. Consider networking and pairing of events on the same weekends using an integrated website and advertising: visual arts, musical entertainment/theatre, plus dining opportunities/sports.
9. Continue to link the regional transportation. Regional transportation to arts events/ tours/ theatre would start expanding the horizons for the region's artists.
10. Don't forget about Clarksburg also known as "Artsburg"! Great examples. Build 100% grassroots art organizations and galleries.

For more information about the benefits of creating a Regional Arts Strategy listen to Bill Anderson and Rosalyn Morrison's conversation on the **New Classical 102.9FM**

www.classicalfm.ca/station-blog/2019/09/06/rosalyn-morrison-talks-arts-culture-southern-georgian-bay/

Benefits of creating a Regional Arts Strategy

- Accessing, connecting, and sharing more data, knowledge, expertise, and resources,
- Identifying key elements of the arts ecosystem to nurture growth,
- Showcasing a broader range of talent to expand audiences,
- Attracting more investment from major sectors including: business, non-profit/charitable, government, and philanthropy, and
- Nurturing a healthy and creative next generation.