

Arts Council receives Mayor's Award of Excellence

By Doug Holmes

The Summerland Community Arts Council is the recipient of the 2023 Mayor's Award of Excellence, an annual recognition given by the Summerland mayor to a local group that makes an outstanding contribution to the community.

Established in 1968, the Arts Council is an umbrella organization covering 14 arts groups and several hundred individuals including painters, potters, stitchers, performers, and writers.

For the past half century, it has served a vital role in Summerland's cultural, social and economic development. By engaging the community in the arts, as participants or audience, the organization consistently responds to local needs and has helped create the town's character and vibrancy.

The District of Summerland's official Community Cultural Plan speaks to how the arts help us express ourselves and form a sense of community. People have a basic desire to create, and research has shown that participation in the arts has a positive impact on physical and mental health, resulting in both individual and community benefits.

The Arts Council holds many workshops and showcases local artists by hosting exhibits and performances, including the popular Music in the Park every Wednesday during the summer. For youth, there is the long-running Summer Arts program, Pro-D Day camps, and Saturday drawing classes, and bursaries are made available to ensure financial barriers do not prevent participation.

The Awesome Arts program is a new initiative dedicated to providing art opportunities to people with diverse developmental abilities, allowing participants to explore different styles and mediums to fit their own personal artistic expressions. Not only does the program give a voice to those who often struggle to achieve independence and participate fully in society, it also demonstrates to the public the importance of diversity and inclusion within the community.

Most of the Awesome Arts participants come from the Summerland Community Support group, and such community partnerships have contributed much to the Arts Council's success.

The Summerland Credit Union, for example, makes a substantial donation to the arts in exchange for the Arts Council curating and displaying artwork in the Credit Union lobby.

The Arts Council also partners with the District of Summerland to produce the colourful street banners that go up around town every summer. As a juried competition, the Banner Project has gained a widespread reputation as a prestigious art commission and every year, more and more artists from around the province submit their designs with the hope of having their work displayed as a Summerland banner.

As a natural progression, the District has asked the Arts Council to produce new Christmas banners to be put up during the festive season. Starting this year, 170 new Christmas banners will be produced with 10 original designs.

Another partnership with the District was, of course, the renovation of the old library building to turn it into the George Ryga Arts and Cultural Centre. The Arts Council was the primary force in the development of this important cultural space and is currently responsible for joint management of the facility.

Mayor's Award of Excellence recipients

2023 – Arts Council

2022 – Auxiliary Firefighters

2020 and 2021 – No award presented

2019 – Blossom Youth Ambassador Program

2018 – Emergency Support Services

2017 – Legion Branch 22

2016 – Kettle Valley Steam Railway

2015 – Food Bank

2014 – Sister City Committee

2013 – Critter Aid

2012 – Lions Club

2011 – Rotary Club

2010 – Healthcare Auxiliary

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland