

MB Arts Council invites rural feedback

By Arlene Davidson

The Manitoba Arts Council (MAC) hosted a community consultation at the Lac du Bonnet Community Centre on Feb. 10 to present a vision for the new improved MAC and encouraged participants to share their views on the proposal.

MAC's new CEO Akoulina Connell has set the course in a brand new direction for the future in the eight short months that she has been at the helm.

After completing a thorough internal review with staff and board members concerning current programs practises and policies, Connell and Elyse Saurette, MAC public relations agent, hit the road to engage residents of rural Manitoba in discussion and consultation regarding the needs of their individual communities.

"MAC was established 50 years ago in the 1960s when aims and needs of the art community were very different than they are today," said Connell.

She said demographics have changed since then and today we see a lot more ethnic and aboriginal artists, the largest of these groups being Cree and Tagalog (Filipino). She also noted that the Francophone community in Manitoba is now predominantly consisting of people from Africa.

"This provides a huge opportunity for arts and culture to play a stronger mutual role in bringing people together," said Connell.

"Self expression is empowerment. Kids get a sense of who they are and that what they have to offer is valid," explained Connell. "We hope to use the arts to bridge the gaps and connect people and communities."

Connell explained that in the past 10 years there has been very little money for organizational funding and because of that it has been hard for smaller councils to establish.

"The emphasis is on excellence with high quality outcomes," said Connell. "Public funding must be accounted for."

Connell reported that during consultations with rural Manitobans, the loud and strong message she was getting was that MAC was not doing a very good job advocating for funding.

Donna Besel of the Winnipeg River Arts Council agreed. "It's time for a change in how MAC is operated," Besel said.

Lac du Bonnet's Fire & Water Festival founder Sheldon Sveinson indicated that MAC should scrap operational fund-



Photo by Arlene Davidson

Elyse Saurette (left) and Akoulina Connell from the Manitoba Arts Council are consulting with residents of rural Manitoba to collect feedback on how to improve services and raise the profile of arts in the province.

ing and focus more on development.

Participants in the discussion voiced frustration about the confusing process of applying for grants. With the large number of current categories, groups and individuals seeking funding have no idea which program to apply for.

Another issue that surfaced was that each category has its own deadline dates, which creates additional confusion when trying to access funds.

Connell agreed that the system needs to change and her proposal will dispose of all the individual categories and streamline applications into five categories: create, share, support, learn and indigenous arts.

Following the formal presentation, Connell invited participants to engage in discussion about their specific needs and offered to meet individually to discuss how to best proceed with a successful application. Connell set up dates with several members before convening the meeting, stating that she would be happy to work with groups to prepare strong application requests that would be more likely to receive approval from the panel of jurists that review them in Winnipeg.

Connell has prepared an online survey found at www.artscouncil.mb.ca and encourages artists and the general public to take the time to provide feedback on how MAC can continue to improve and support the arts in Manitoba.

Send in your favourite photo(s) of Lac du Bonnet & Area and you could win a prize pack from The Clipper!

LAC DU BONNET LIVING MAGAZINE PHOTO CONTEST

Photo categories include: recreation, scenery, wildlife - and can be from any of the four seasons.

VINTAGE PHOTOS FOR THIS YEAR'S MAGAZINE:
In celebration of the RM of Lac du Bonnet's 100th, we would like to include photos of the area from days gone by, so please send those in also and we'll try include them.

Photos may be emailed to ldbnews@clipper.mb.ca OR dropped off at The Clipper Office in LdB. Please be sure to state your name and contact info.

Lac du Bonnet CLIPPER

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