

Cultural Centre to bring concerts, programming into seniors' residences thanks to community grant



Music is a universal language that transcends all barriers ? and now the physical barrier that might keep local seniors from live local concerts is in the process of being erased thanks to the Aurora Cultural Centre and a recent grant of \$64,300 from Ontario's Resilient Communities Fund.

The Aurora Cultural Centre received the grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) last year to purchase a new mobile audio/video hub to livestream their concerts to ticketholders when in-person attendance was less secure due to ever-evolving public health orders stemming from the global pandemic.

Now that the worst of the pandemic appears to be over, the Centre will use its new tech to continue its live-streaming program but now with an educational component to teach staff at area senior care facilities how to access live-streamed and recorded events to bring more culture into the residences.

At a special announcement held last week at Chartwell Park Place, this new chapter was billed by Suzanne Haines, the Centre's Executive Director, as a ?way to contribute building programming for the community with Chartwell and other retirement residences.?

?We are grateful to this collection of individuals and organizations that has come together to enable a new opportunity in the community,? said Haines. ?[The development of Aurora Town Square] moved us offsite to various venues for performing arts programs and? other arts organizations, particularly those with performing arts programs, struggled under the crushing weight of COVID, because the arts are very interactive activities. We have seen the Provincial government respond to this reality [for] not-for-profit organizations through the Ontario Trillium Foundation. While other performing arts venues requested funds from federal sources to add livestream equipment to their venues, we, without a venue, were unable to do so.

?We put our heads together and consulted with our OTF program officers to see if a new idea would be possible for Aurora and whether we would be welcome into the program. Along with some support for strategic planning and supporting staff, we applied to bring this innovative solution to life. In April of 2022 we were successful in receiving the Resilient Communities Grant from the OTF to purchase a mobile livestream rig. It's to broadcast and record our nomadic programming while we are offsite from our home, including training, and the grant actually includes training and support to activate the equipment. Unknown at the time, the skills

gained and versatility of the equipment would further expand our ability to prepare videos and support for all of our programming, helping the organization build capacity in several areas.?

The opportunity to bring further arts and culture programming into residences like Chartwell Park Place was hailed by staff at last Wednesday's announcement.

?Our motto and mission is to make people's lives better and we appreciate and respect that you have given us this privilege this morning,? said Chartwell's Mary Minielli. ?What we're doing here today with [the OTF and the Cultural Centre] is truly amazing and I can't think of a more amazing group of older adults to benefit.?

This sentiment was shared by Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa.

?Through their allocation of the \$64,300 OTF Resilient Communities Fund Grant, both the Aurora Cultural Centre and Chartwell Park Place Retirement Residence have demonstrated a sincere commitment to accommodating residents in senior care homes by providing them with the experience of art, culture and heritage in the comfort of their home,? he said. ?Through the installation of these new technologies ? most notably, the mobile hub ? and the training of Chartwell staff on their operation, seniors will be given the opportunity to engage with their community in a meaningful way during a period of social isolation.?

Added Yash Kapur of the OTF: ?Our mission remains simple: to help build healthier, more vibrant communities across Ontario. We are proud to support organizations like yours and know that [funds] to update your programs and policies and purchase new supplies and equipment will go a long way towards doing just that, now and into the future.?

Looking to the future was a theme embraced by the OTF, MPP Parsa, Chartwell and the Cultural Centre, with Haines noting the continued efforts to break down barriers, no matter what the future holds.

?It was our intention when we looked at the equipment and we continued to look for new ways to bring it out to our communities that are somewhat isolated, who aren't able to make the concerts, this is an incredible opportunity and where geography is no longer a challenge. We certainly saw those isolated communities in sharp focus during COVID and we're able to deliver this programming.?

Following the ceremony, she added, ?This mobile technology will continue to be effective for us upon our return to Aurora Town Square, creating access for those who may always be isolated in our community.?

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