

## Senior musician brings retirement community together through power of song

Dean Jablonsky has always had a love for music and is no stranger to seeing how a few notes, arranged just right, can bring people together.

He had a front row seat playing alongside Canadian greats like Gordon Lightfoot in the 1970s and 80s, and now, as a resident of Kingsway Place Retirement Residence, he is bringing his talents to the table helping his fellow residents discover their voices.

Last Tuesday, the Kingsway Place Choir performed for residents' families and special guest Mayor Tom Mrakas.

The group has come a long way since a chance conversation in Kingsway Bistro planted the seed which bloomed into a choir that is keeping seniors engaged and having fun.

One day I was sitting there with my coffee, the girls who knew I was a musician said, 'Why don't you start up a choir?' I wasn't sure, I told them, it depended on how many people really wanted to do this,' Dean recalls. 'It started out with about four of us with this idea, we tried to pull in some people who liked to sing --- or didn't like to sing, it didn't matter. If you had a voice, it sounded great.

At our first practice, we had about six people show up but it kind of snowballed. More people got interested so they started coming down. I started arranging songs as I play guitar and keyboard, and I wanted to challenge them by not doing the ritual old folk songs like 'Row Row Row Your Boat.' I challenged them to sing Linda Ronstadt, B.B. King, Gordon Lightfoot and some other artists I knew personally.

The challenge was a success and there now 17 choir members who have mastered more than 20 songs that Jablonsky has tailored to their talents.

I tell them not to worry about being professionals. Nobody's a professional singer here. It is to have a social aspect, to have them all doing something that they enjoy. It has developed into a kind of family thing, really. All of us feel like part of a family.

One member of this 'family' is Pat Davies, who has also had a life-long love of music.

An enthusiastic contributor to the choir, he says being a part of the initiative has inspired 'uplifting joy.'

'We talk together, we all love to sing and it gives us an uplifting feeling,' says Davies. 'Those who hear it seem to really enjoy it and they're thrilled we have something like this, and I hope it continues after I'm gone. It's not like bringing someone in from the outside singing to you; it's people on the inside singing to the family and that's a different gig altogether.

I think it brings social harmony, social fun, at least that's what I saw 'it's fun and we hope it is fun to the listeners. If we get booed off stage, that will be a different story!'

There was no danger of that last Tuesday and there were smiles all around as they took their place in the rear parking lot of Kingsway as residents, their families and dignitaries filled the terraces ready for the show.

Ahead of the concert, Katherine Corbett, a Kingsway volunteer who has worked closely with the choir, shared her excitement over how this group of musicians has come together towards a common goal.

I am an enthusiastic and grateful volunteer and what I've seen is it brings a sense of camaraderie and there are definitely health benefits to singing,' she said. 'It's a stress release and doing things all together feeds us, too. We don't sing enough in our everyday life these days and I think this is wonderful. In the past, I have enjoyed being in the choir because you're considering tempo,

enunciation, volume and all of those things and it is a very immersive activity.

?They have a lot of fun, a great sense of humour and the jokes between the songs are a lot of fun. You feel like you're part of a team!?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter