



Kawartha Works
Community
Co-operative



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Launch of New Outdoor Amphitheatre and Professional Theatre Company THE GROVE THEATRE

September 17, 2020 - Fenelon Falls, ON - A stunning outdoor amphitheatre – the first ever in Fenelon Falls – will be home to The Grove Theatre, an exciting new summer festival of live performance.

Created under the auspices of the Kawartha Works Community Co-operative (KWCC), with construction funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and additional support from members of the local community, The Grove Theatre has been conceived to engage and inspire both visitors and local residents. The annual festival will bring new vitality not only to Fenelon Falls itself but to the whole region of Kawartha Lakes.

Built into the garden grove of the Fenelon Falls Fairgrounds, the spacious 450-seat venue will be home to high-quality professional theatre staged in an idyllic natural setting. Friends and family will gather to enjoy open-air performances ranging from lively musical theatre to popular Shakespeare plays.

Its potential audience base is already substantial – the surrounding community comprises 75,000 people, with an additional 31,000 summer residents - and will expand exponentially in subsequent years as awareness grows. Meanwhile, continuing uncertainty around the reopening of indoor venues will make the open-air Grove Theatre even more attractive to visitors who come seeking entertainment and whose spending will bring tremendous economic benefit to the community, including those from the GTA. Only 90 minutes away, there is a large theatre-going public ready to spend time in the beautiful Kawarthas.

“The idea for this project initially came through the Downtown Revitalization Committee,” said Lynne Manning, Chair of Downtown Revitalization for Fenelon Falls. “The arts have a proven track record for revitalization of communities. The Stratford Festival began in a tent and Stratford has since become a vibrant town through the development of theatre, arts, retail and restaurants. We believe that Fenelon Falls and this area can develop into an equally vibrant arts community. There is so much potential here.”

A systematic ten-year plan, laying out a clear strategic path from inception onward, will drive the festival’s growth beginning with a planned production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the musical* in the summer of 2021. The theatre will grow to contain a summer repertory festival of three shows and a robust education program for youth 6-17.

“For us, the initial impetus for this theatre came out of discussions around the immense growth and potential we saw in the area and the desire to create a cultural hub within the town,” said Artistic Director Christy Yael. Yael spent her summers growing up in the Fenelon Falls area before moving to San Diego, California to launch a theatre company with her husband. Their company quickly became a critical and commercial success and was lauded as one of the leading companies in the region. Bringing a collective forty years of theatre experience with them, Christy Yael and Sean Cox are looking forward to bringing exciting and innovative theatre and educational programming to a community that they love.

One of the core values of the collaboration between KWCC and The Grove Theatre is a commitment to include and create space for people with developmental and/or physical disabilities through fully inclusive employment opportunities and education programming. “By instituting inclusive best practices in the early years, we affirm our dedication to a model that treats inclusion as standard protocol and not as an afterthought,” said Yael.

The Grove Theatre is also deeply invested in the social, cultural and economic development of Fenelon Falls and prioritize their relationship with the local community. They have established key relationships with the Fenelon Falls Chamber of Commerce and its member businesses, as well as with the City of Kawartha Lakes, specifically with its economic development department. The Fenelon Falls Chamber of Commerce and the City of Kawartha Lakes both strongly support the Grove Theatre project. It is central to their business model that they integrate with the community from inception: that model includes prioritizing community use of the venue for everything from community theatre and concerts to faith services and ceremonies.

“The space has been built with a community-first mindset,” said Tim Wisener, President of the Fenelon Falls and District Chamber of Commerce. “This can become a centre of community and an asset for everyone in the Fenelon area. I look forward to seeing a dance recital, church service, Shakespeare play, movie and a band all on that stage, in the same weekend. The space can become a hub for the creative life in Fenelon Falls. And as an outdoor venue, it’s an even safer place to be during COVID.”

The Grove Theatre is still fundraising for the upcoming season. “All of our Co-op projects rely on community support for success,” said Jim Armstrong, President of Kawartha Works Community Co-operative. “There has already been an encouraging response. We have already raised over \$200,000 towards our goal of raising \$600,000.” For those interested in donating, email donate@grovetheatre.ca or visit grovetheatre.ca/donate for more information.

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