

Place for the Arts growing as music venue



Rick Fines surprised a full house at Bancroft's A Place for the Arts on Friday, when he joined local band Salty Dog for a blues set. Photo by Patsy Kapitain

By Sarah Vance

A Place for the Arts was the weekend's hot-spot, with two eclectic back-to-back events over two separate days.

Last Friday, Rick Fines, Juno award nominee and Maple Blues Solo Act of the Year made an unannounced visit to the artist's co-operative, sharing the stage with local blues band Salty Dog.

To add to the ambience, an occasional events permit allowed for the service of specialty beverages in the gallery setting on Bridge Street, in Ontario's Most Talented Town.

Salty Dog's frontmen Adam Palmer, Ron Kapitain, Tony Donkers and Jesse Hanna are favourites in the area and A Place for the Arts proved itself able to accommodate both their fans and the band's gritty live performance.

"We played a blues evening in November and the acoustics are pretty good," said Kapitain. "We try hard to get a good sound quality as well as a tolerable sound level."

The emergence of A Place for the Arts as a live music venue continues to add to the functionality of this community-driven arts space. Local folk icon John Foreman also hosts his open-mic cafe in the studio on the last Friday of every month. The owners are taking these tips to ensure they continue to make the right decisions for this growing venue and book the best artists.

"We are really open to any form of creativity and the space has become a hub for all art forms," said Joey Bruni, a member of the local arts cooperative. "We are happy to accommodate interested individuals."

The following day, A Place for the Arts facilitated conversations between existing and prospective members during a public open house.

A strong commitment was demonstrated by existing members who showed up to play music and discuss the role of arts in North Hastings.

"I am an artist member and I have taken over running the website," said Jackie Lewis, a visual artist who is also on the co-op's steering committee.

"Web navigation is a new skill and it is a way that I can give back to the community."

Other agencies and businesses play a role, such as the North Hastings Community Trust and The Parista, a local coffee shop, which share a space at the studio.

"This is a great location for the Community Trust because it is accessible and right downtown," said Brenda Pitz, who works for the local not-for-profit agency. "We meet many disheartened people who are truly struggling, and this facility is a warm and welcoming contact point."

"A Place for the Arts has a few different membership levels, for artists and community members," said Joey Bruni. "I currently have an artist membership which allows me to display my work at the space."

This downtown studio continues to emerge as a positive parallel business to the other local galleries that are nestled along the Bridge and Hastings intersection, near the Village Playhouse, in Bancroft's theatre district.

There is an undeniable economic impact to arts investment. In 2010, a report commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council found that 9.5 million overnight tourists to Ontario actively sought arts activities during their visits.

Arts tourism is further estimated to support 67,000 jobs and \$2.4 billion in wages annually in Ontario. A Place for the Arts' tiered membership categories enable community members and artists to gain affordable access to this dynamic venue. Learn more from the website at <http://aplaceforthearts.com> or make a real time visit, to see it for yourself.