

South Algonquin poetry signs update

By Mike Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The poetry signage in South Algonquin Township will be coming soon. Bryan Martin, the CAO/clerk-treasurer of South Algonquin Township provides an update on his efforts to make this project happen in his township, saying he has given Charlene Alexander, the CEO and head librarian of the South Algonquin libraries the green light to proceed. Anya Gansterer, the co-artistic director at Ottawa Valley Community Arts provides more information about the poetry initiative in general and says that signs have already been installed in public spaces throughout the Ottawa Valley.

Gansterer provided Bancroft This Week with more information about the pop-up poetry signs being designed and installed in public spaces throughout the Ottawa valley.

"We are installing signs in Ottawa Valley communities that feature collaboratively created poems that were created this past winter. The public was invited to contribute words and phrases on the subject of longing. As part of this second poetry phase, the public will be invited to contribute words and phrases for the next series of poems," she says.

This next series of poems will be on the subject of release. Gansterer says that so far, they have installed pop up poetry signs in Deep River and Combermere for people to read and enjoy this summer.

As Councillor Dave Harper said at the last South Algonquin Township council meeting, Ottawa Valley Community Arts, in partnership with the Community Resource Centre in Killaloe, received a three year Grow Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. This Grow Grant will allow the Pop-Up Art program, which was started up in 2019, to expand in a number of ways over the next few years. There will be pop-up art galleries and exhibitions, pop-up art making and pop-up events like the poetry signs.

The OV-CAOS emphasizes that the project is for everyone; Renfrew County residents in general, artists, artist facilitators and as an art exhibition host. It is intended to be an inclusive program, where many diverse voices are heard through the art created. They also assure prospective participants that all COVID-19 health and safety measures will be followed as required.

OV-CAOS explains on their website their rationale for initiating and maintaining the Pop-Up Art project;

"Currently, Renfrew County does not have a public art gallery but we do have many artists and cultural workers. Renfrew County is very large geographically and we don't have public transportation. Through Pop-Up Art, we explore the impact and viability of bringing mobile art experiences to people living in rural communities?...giving residents increased access to meaningful artistic experiences."

Harper had said that OV-CAOS was looking to put these poetry signs on existing structures at the beach at Whitney and on the beach in Madawaska. There would be two 12-inch by 16-inch aluminum signs at these locations with five or six lines of poetry on them. Over the past several years, there has been similar poetry on signs initiatives in other towns and cities across North America like Vancouver, New York City, Hadley, Massachusetts and Birmingham, Alabama.

Martin provided an update on where South Algonquin Township is at with regard to the installation of these poetry signs. He has been looking into getting these signs approved for installation since the last township council meeting on July 7, when Harper brought up the initiative to council. He said in an email on July 26 to Bancroft This Week that he had given Alexander the go ahead to proceed with getting these signs installed within the municipality. Alexander confirmed that she'd gotten the permission to go ahead.

"I do not have anything further to report with this project. I am not sure when [the signs] will be installed, hopefully soon."