

Support for new theatre management

To the Editor,

I am a fan of the Village Playhouse. It is a spectacular building, a wonderful small theatre, and a perfect rental venue for culture and the arts in Bancroft. That is why I am thrilled that someone has finally put the interests of the Playhouse first and ended special rent deals for summer theatre.

For the past 24 years, summer theatre has received drastically discounted rent, at less than their share of the building's operating costs, and at much less than other community, arts, and cultural groups were paying. Far, far, far less than market value ? even more so when you consider the vastly increased market that summer cottagers bring. That ended when a new leaseholder ? Hospice North Hastings ? took over management of the Playhouse.

As a result of Hospice's management, Bancroft's Village Playhouse is looking better than ever. In one short year since they took over the lease, there has been much needed and long overdue renovations of five bathrooms, the Green Room, the lobby, a new patio and decking, and soon the kitchen. There is an entirely new (and ?state of the art? ? which it wasn't before) sound system. This past week 17 sorely needed new stage lights arrived, which will replace aging equipment.

Have all those improvements to and investments in the venue made it ?inaccessible to community groups?? Not at all. The truth is that rental rates for most community groups have decreased. If your organization has previously been put off by the too-high daily rental rate, find out how things have changed for the better. Not only has rent gone down, St. Paul's United Church (which owns the Playhouse building and has a partnership agreement with North Hastings Hospice to manage it) gets significantly more money from revenue sharing than before.

The Village Playhouse will be very busy this summer. In fact, the Playhouse will generate more of the rental revenue that covers operating expenses from a dozen bookings than two months of summer theatre ? without the ?black out? dates from long production times. TIFF movies can continue, lobby rentals can continue, and this summer will showcase a full schedule of live theatre, live music, comedy, magic, improv, opera, and cabaret. There will even be a week-long theatre camp for young people with the theatre bug. Check out boxofficebancroft.com to see how much more is going on.

Local shops and restaurants will still benefit from audiences coming to town before shows. Sponsors can still reach summer cottagers easily and inexpensively by contacting the Hospice to sponsor a show. High school students or other volunteers with an interest in theatre can still be trained in front of house or stagecraft roles to support the Village Playhouse - In May there was a two day audio training session by an audio professional, and in coming weeks, there will be a stage lighting training session by a theatre professional.

The Village Playhouse remains a community based venue that now sees a greater number and a wider variety of community and other arts and culture groups than ever before. It is more accessible and affordable than before. It is better looking than ever before, it is busier than ever before, and it is under better management than ever before. It is unfortunate that summer theatre chose to give up being a part of this revitalized Village Playhouse by demanding yet another ?deal? rather than paying a fair rent that covers their fair share of the building's operating expenses.

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