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By Derek Baldwin

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Quinte Arts Council has a new leader armed with a well-earned Canadian perspective on the arts that should, by all accounts, complement a thriving local arts community, say QAC board members.

Only weeks after settling into her new executive director position, Carol Feeney says she is still gauging the organization but is already setting her sites on strategies to increase the profile of the community arts group.

Feeney, 48, returned last month to her hometown of Belleville from where she left at age 26 to pursue a life on Canada's west coast. It was in Vancouver where the young and ambitious general manager of the Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island worked for five years before moving back to Ontario.

For the last 15 years, Feeney worked and lived in Toronto where she honed her skills in various disciplines from arts administration and fund-raising to marketing, special events organization and communications.

A former vice-president of Edelman Worldwide public relations, Feeney was associated with top-drawer arts and charitable ventures, including the noted du Maurier Arts Council with which she travelled to remote corners of the country.

The exposure, she said, to many forms of theatre and visual arts in small and big arts communities across the country offered her a chance to observe a patchwork of talents, art forms and personalities that contribute greatly to Canada's unique identity.

The experiences helped Feeney find her own fundraising and marketing company that was affiliated with some of Canada's arts entities, including the National Theatre School of Canada, the Society of Graphic Designers and the Ontario College of Art and Design.

Hard work paid off for Feeney, who was most recently presented with one of the Queen's Golden

Jubilee Medals for Outstanding Service. She is also the recipient of the Internet World Impact Award for Communications in 1997.

Feeney said she was delighted not only to return home where she still has family and friends, but to also witness firsthand the depth and breadth of arts in the region as represented by the agency.

With more than 500 members, she said, the QAC is a central data base and resource for a wide and varied spectrum of creative expression that appears to be very much alive and well in Quinte.

"It's amazing the talent and the amount of activities that are going on here," said Feeney. "You're not bored here. There's a lot to do from visual arts to ballet to the symphony. That's what keeps me going, the variety, and the challenge of variety."

Celebrating that variety of the arts is the very essence of the QAC.

Helping people who do not have a full understanding of the QAC and its many members is also a goal, she said.

"That's part of the job we have to do, is to communicate what the organization does, what kinds of artists we represent. There is a lot of confusion out there about who we are and what we represent. I want every person to know what the QAC is and what we do," said Feeney.

Feeney replaces outgoing former executive director Marilyn Lawrie.

In a statement, QAC chairman Margaret Werkhoven said the board was pleased that Feeney has assumed the top staff position at the organization.

"The board of directors is proud and excited to have someone of Carol's calibre, enthusiasm and extensive arts experience to take over the helm of the Quinte Arts Council. While we are sorry to see Marilyn Lawrie go, we look forward to working with Carol as we continue our mission to promote and support the arts and artists in the Quinte area," Werkhoven said.

Feeney, she said, was selected after an "extensive recruitment process" which reviewed job applicants from Kingston to Montreal.

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