

# Coronavirus hits Kawartha Lakes arts groups

*Catherine Whitnall*

Barbara Doyle would love to be on her feet, doing tours at the Olde Gaol Museum, but she understands why she's not.

"No amount of door admission is worth people getting sick," said Doyle, Victoria County Historical Society treasurer and museum volunteer.

Like many other arts, culture and heritage groups, the museum has cancelled programming and closed its doors to the public.

"We have followed direction from the Ministry of Health and the Ontario Museum Association," said Doyle noting the plan to reopen April 7, but the museum will remain closed as long as a threat to public health exists. "The big problem for us is that we have so many touch surfaces in this building it's virtually impossible to keep it clean and sanitized. Even if we could, our artifacts can't take that type of exposure to chemicals."

According to Statistics Canada, more than 170,000 people are employed in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector — that includes the performing arts, spectator sports, heritage and amusement — in Ontario. Close to 61 per cent are employed in the amusement, gambling and recreation sector alone. One-third are between the ages of 15 and 24.

Doyle noted while the physical doors are closed, the museum is still "accessible."

"We're fortunate to have online exhibits. It may not have everything the museum has, but it has things the museum doesn't," she explained.

Unfortunately, with a large percentage of people working from home, it's meant the museum's major, three-year grant submission is in limbo. Without knowing if the funds are available, Doyle said plans for those exhibits and hiring simply can't take place.

Doyle said with the COVID-19 situation changing daily — and the province having declared a state of emergency — plans are being evaluated on an ongoing basis.

It's something Sarah Quick and James Barrett, co-owners of Globus Theatre, never thought they would have to tackle.

"We have had to (make) decisions that we never expected to," said Quick. "You always plan for a crisis but you never think you'll ever have to use it."

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Even though the live theatre company's summer season doesn't kick off until June 23, in a way, that's the easy part.

“This is a very busy time for us,” said Quick, explaining now is when the company pulls together its casting, sponsorship and marketing plans. “And we can’t be spending money if we’re unsure if there will be any money coming in.”

This dilemma is being faced by many arts and entertainment businesses presently.

“The hardest thing for the arts is the fact that, all of a sudden, there are these wide-sweeping closures and cancellations taking place. There’s good reason for them, but it’s not exactly an industry that’s flush. This could be devastating economically for so many. There’s a ton of people in the entertainment industry that suddenly don’t have an income coming in.”

It’s especially challenging for those who are self-employed or do contract work — like actors and musicians — as there is likely no employment insurance to fall back on, said Quick.

In some cases, the decision to close has been taken out of some group’s hands.

The closure of all Kawartha Lakes library branches has meant the Kawartha Art Gallery had to follow suit, as it is located on the second floor of the Lindsay branch. The gallery is closed until at least April 6.

“The health, safety and well-being of our community is a priority to the gallery and we will continue to follow the lead of our municipal and public health authorities,” said president Doug Currie, noting, despite this, staff continue to work on program development.

“Should the building closure continue beyond April 6, the gallery will look at creating online exhibit experiences for the public,” continued Currie.

Academy Theatre for Performing Arts general manager Craig Metcalf said the initial plan was to postpone March events and reassess the situation at the end of the month.

“At least, that was the plan up until today [March 17],” said Metcalf noting it’s likely even the two remaining events for April will be cancelled or rescheduled. “I’ve even been talking to promoters who had bookings in May who are looking to reschedule for September ... So right now, we’re hoping for the best, but trying to plan for the worst.”



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