



JOYCE CASSIN Sun Media

The Shelter Valley Folk Festival board is in place and ready to go for the September event. Picture are, from left, David Sheffield, Elizabeth Scriven, Barb Harnden, Andrew Buntin, Leslie Benson, Arnie Henkel, David Newland and Candace Shaw.

■ **MUSIC:** Board reports interest in performing and planning event is strong

Shelter Valley Folk Festival tuning up

BY JOYCE CASSIN

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If you've ever driven past the display board in Grafton prior to the Shelter Valley Folk Festival, you're probably used to seeing how many sleeps before the event begins and, as of today, it's just 192 more sleeps until the event Sept. 4 to 6.

It's been a successful five years and the Shelter Valley Folk Festival board is busy preparing for year six.

A large group of enthusiastic volunteers and supporters of the grassroots festival met at the annual general meeting in Grafton town hall Feb. 13., when it was revealed how they went from a dream to a reality.

"We've had five successful festivals and all have finished in the black," said chair Andrew Buntin. "It's almost unheard of."

It's gone from a small venture to one that's known across the country, the continent and the world, said artistic director Angus Finnan.

"Shelter Valley Folk Festival is well known in the folk festival circuit," said interim executive director Kathy Partridge. "The buzz about this festival at conferences is very good."

In 2008 they were about 40 tickets away from being sold out and they hope to surpass that this year.

"We had record attendance with 1,600 tickets sold on the Saturday," said Partridge.

She shared survey results showing 13% of people were back for the fifth year, 34% were first-time visitors and 90% were there for the entire weekend.

"And that's what we want," said Partridge. "We want people to come and experience the whole event."

She said people didn't necessarily like just one aspect of the weekend, they thought all of the entertainment, including music, workshops, children's area, camping, etc., were important to them.

Some 98% said it was user-friendly, 98% would recommend the festival to others and 82% said excellent service was provided, said Partridge.

Excellent service is not hard to understand when the festival had 285 volunteers to ensure it, she said.

"Volunteer service is so critical to the event, and we had up to 7,000 volunteer hours last year."

David Dillon, chair of the nominations committee, said 15 names were put forward for nominations to the board this year and there were four successful candidates.

Andrew Buntin was re-elected, as was Leslie Benson, and for the first time, David Sheffield and Trevor Mills were elected to the board.

"This festival has been founded and sustained by volunteer energy," said Dillon.

Finnan said there is an incredible amount of interest in being part of

this year's lineup and, as in the past, it will not be based on headliners.

The call for performers closed Jan. 1 with more than 600 submissions that Finnan and his crew must sift through to determine who will best fit the festival's image.

"We had an all-Canadian lineup for our fifth year and it was an incredible year," he said. "There are so many incredibly talented artists."

Finnan started the festival six years ago and volunteered his time for the first four, being paid for the pleasure the past one-and-a-half years, but he said it's time for new faces and ideas.

"One can only do a job for so long," he said. "There's a time for the founder to be in the role and a time for new voices and new perspectives."

And there appears to be a lot of interest in the executive director role. Buntin said numerous applications for the position can in by the recent deadline.

"There were a lot of strong applicants and a lot of them," he said. "A lot were from the broader community, not just this one."

"We expect to have a new executive director in place by April 1," said Buntin.

As well, this year's lineup for the Labour Day weekend event is expected to be firm by May 1 when tickets go on sale, he said.

■ **LOTTERIES**

10