



Photo by PETER MARTIN

Town's new theatre, now under construction on site just north of Centennial Library, "will be an important milestone in the evolution of the arts in Oakville," says PADGO chairman Marilyn Jones.

PADGO works to build bridge across footlights

By LINDA JACOBS

People who say "theatah" with stiff upper lip and nose pointed due north can steer clear of the Performing Arts Development Group of Oakville.

The group with the formidable name (members call it simply PADGO) is dedicated to making the performing arts less formidable to the average citizen.

PADGO was born in 1974 following a study of the Oakville arts scene that found most of the town's performing arts group — including actors, singers, dancers and those who pluck, blow or pound musical instruments — counted only their friends and families in the audience.

PADGO doesn't fault the various artists involved for the dismal track record. The findings of PADGO's study laid the blame on inadequate facilities, Oakville's easy access to big-name talents in Toronto and the town's transient population.

As a result, PADGO set out to make people aware of what the various groups in town have to offer.

Groups include the Oakville Players, freeform theatre, the Burl-Oak Theatre Group, Oakville Youththeatre, the Oakville Symphony Orchestra, the Oakville Citizens' Band, Kelso Music Centre, the Whiteoaks Choral Society, Tempus Youthchoir, the Whiteoaks Men of Harmony, the Oakville Junior Ballet Company and theatre arts students at Sheridan College.

One popular — and controversial — group that existed in the summer of 1975, called the Oakville Repertory Theatre Company, brought Oakville theatre-in-a-tent entertainment. The repertory theatre experiment was a bid to overcome the big problem facing all of the groups — no place to perform.

That problem, of course, is disappearing as quickly as workmen can build the town's performing arts centre beside Centennial Library and swimming pool.

"The performing arts centre will be an important milestone in the evolution of the arts in Oakville," says PADGO chairman and founder Marilyn Jones.

"But it would be a mistake to see an arts program in terms of four walls. The program must serve people."

One of the biggest stumbling blocks encountered by PADGO members in their efforts to turn people onto the performing arts is overcoming many people's fear or sense of awe, Jones says.

Many people entering a large auditorium for the performing arts experience a queasy feeling that they really don't belong in such a grand place, she says. If the feeling is strong enough to keep people from attending a theatrical perfor-

mance, then the auditorium has done the reverse of what it was meant to do — provide a forum for people to enjoy the performing arts.

"If you say to someone, you can only participate in the arts behind those walls, then many won't even try," Jones says.

The decade-long controversy over whether to build a performing arts centre in town has made many people feel it's not their centre yet — that it's the private preserve of a snobbish few.

PADGO sees itself as a catalyst in getting as many people as possible interested in the performing arts, inside and outside the performing arts centre's walls.

Interest in theatre need not be expressed merely in performing or watching or listening to performers, says Jones. People can get involved in set construction, makeup, publicity or in a myriad of different ways.

In drama, there are the long-established and award-winning Oakville Players, the new Burl-Oak Theatre Group and the innovative freeform theatre, which devotes its proceeds to charitable organizations.

PADGO publicizes activities of all the groups in an attempt to make them known. It is also co-sponsoring a family concerts series on Sunday afternoons, taking each concert to a different school each week to expose as many people as possible to the music.

PADGO eventually hopes to become an arts council, drawing on both the performing artists and their audience for advice on an ongoing arts program for Oakville.

"We think that interaction across the footlights is important," says Jones.

Pottery boom

Now is a good time for potters, reports Maplehurst Avenue resident Moonyeen Cormack who teaches pottery classes for the Oakville Art Society.

"In the last five years or so, people have become really interested in pottery, especially young people," she says. They seem to be getting back to handcrafts, to something they feel a person has done with his hands."

The hottest selling items are functional pieces of pottery: cookware, bowls and plant containers. At the same time, though, there is a surging interest in non-functional pottery, in pottery as an artform, she says.

A potter for about eight years, Cormack has stopped taking orders for her work because that can deteriorate too quickly into an assembly-line rat race.

Even the bigger department stores, Eaton's and Simpson's are getting into the act, purchasing pottery from individual potters or buying commercially done pottery that looks as if it had been handthrown, she says.

An Eaton's representative attended an Oakville Art Society Art-in-the-Park show a couple of years ago and bought several pieces of local pottery to sell at Eaton's, Cormack says.

"They seem to be realizing that people want things handcrafted rather than something imported from Japan," she says.

There are about a dozen potters in Oakville working at the professional level, says Cormack.

The past president of the Oakville Art Society, Cormack says she hates the attitude she detects in many people that members of the art society are elitist snobs.

Because many people think of artists as "those other people", the art society is having difficulty raising money from the general public for a new building in Coronation Park.

The new building will provide more exhibition space, more working space and more classroom space for students of the Oakville Art Society.

It will be a decided asset for Oakville, says Cormack.