

Uxbridge Celebration of the Arts

Volunteers help bring Uxbridge arts festival to fruition

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Correspondent

Barbs have helped to make the Uxbridge Celebration of the Arts the festival it is today.

Barb Murphy and Barb Pratt are Celebration veterans who, along with many other dedicated volunteers, have worked to develop one of the finest arts festivals in Canada. Murphy, who became involved in 1988, was struck by two things when she attended the first Celebration in 1986.

"It was a very ambitious program, probably more ambitious than anything we've done since," she recalled, "but I was appalled at the dismal audience figures because the program was so wonderful."

Murphy, who was on the library board at the time, wrote to the Celebration committee to tell them how impressed she had been with the event. "I said I knew they must be disappointed with the audience, but Uxbridge takes time to accept things and I asked them to give us another chance."

In 1988, she joined the committee as publicity assistant, "and I've been with them ever since. I wouldn't miss it for the world."

While she acknowledged that many people have contributed to the success of the venture, her highest praise is reserved for those who refused to give up after the poor audience turnout in the first year. "To go back and

port for the Celebration which has also been an important factor in its success," she said. Murphy handled public relations for two years and then took on the role of chairman. "Now I'm doing film because I'm an

Celebration comes from taking on new jobs and learning about different aspects of the arts," she noted. Judging by this year's excellent lineup of films, which includes the Academy award-winning animated short, "Bob's Birthday," Murphy has, indeed, become something of an expert during her research.

It was Murphy who approached Barb Pratt, owner of Blue Heron Books, and invited her to attend a meeting in 1989.

"I had just gone to a couple of events in previous years and I went out feeling very shy and unsure of myself, but Barb had a spot for me on her committee," said Pratt.

1991 marked the debut of her immensely popular Books and Authors' night, which has brought to the Celebration such internationally known writers as Nino Ricci and Timothy Findley and which this year will feature Barbara Gowdy, Allison Gordon and Ted Barris.

"It was a huge success from the start," recalled Murphy. "I remember coming in on the day we first did it and saying to Barb, 'What's the smallest

attendance that would make you not want to quit?' and she said '30' and we had 150 or 200. I just couldn't believe it."

"I felt good, but I was much more confident than anybody else, because I'd talked to a lot of people across the counter and I knew who was going to come," explained Pratt.

"The proof that people really do enjoy being involved with the Celebration is that the very day after it's over, we're already talking about what we're going to do next year," Murphy said.

"We can hardly wait until next year so that we can make it better," agreed Pratt.

The only qualifications volunteers need are enthusiasm and a love of the arts although, according to Murphy, preference will be given to people whose name is Barb.



Barb Pratt (left) and Barb Murphy, are two veteran volunteers who help make the Celebration of the Arts festival a reality year after year.

do it again without letting their disappointment get the better of them was just incredible."

The municipality has shown a high level of enthusiasm and support

expert," she said with a chuckle. "I can spell filmmaker."

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