

# OPINION

PUBLISHER *Ian Proudfoot*

GENERAL MANAGER *John Willems*

Stouffville  
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6290 Main St.  
Stouffville, ON L4A 1G7  
www.yorkregion.com

Stouffville  
**Sun-Tribune**

905-640-2612  
Fax: 905-640-8778  
Class: 1-800-743-3353  
DISTRIBUTION  
905-294-8244

EDITOR IN CHIEF  
*Debora Kelly*  
dkelly@yrmg.com

DIRECTOR, BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION  
*Robert Lazurko*

DIRECTOR,  
REGIONAL PRODUCTS  
AND CLASSIFIED  
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MARKETING AND SALES  
DEVELOPMENT  
*Gord Paolucci*

Editor  
*Jim Mason*  
jmason@yrmg.com

Advertising Manager  
*Dave Williams*  
dwilliams@yrmg.com

Circulation  
Co-ordinator  
*Daphne Laurie*  
dlaurie@yrmg.com

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## Editorial

# Town could invest more in arts and culture scene

**ISSUE: Municipal councils are debating budget priorities. Are the arts a priority?**

It is just about that time of year when local politicians in all York municipalities start to take a long, hard look at the financial books and decide how to best spend your hard-earned tax dollars.

Typically, a lot of that money goes toward projects such as building fire halls, purchasing new snowplows, paving roads, replacing turf on soccer fields and filling potholes.

By comparison, very little money is invested in arts and culture programs and facilities.

We think that is a mistake worth correcting.

A vibrant arts and culture scene is crucial to creating strong, vibrant communities.

There is also no doubt it is really good for the local economy.

A study released earlier this year found arts and culture tourists spend nearly twice as much money, stay overnight longer and eat at restaurants more often than typical tourists.

To be more specific, Ontario arts and culture tourists spend, on average, \$667 per trip versus \$374 for the typical tourist, according to the study commissioned by the Ontario Arts Council.

Arts and culture tourists, on average, stay overnight 42 per cent longer than the typical tourist, at 4.4 nights compared to 3.1 nights.

And they are twice as likely to dine at local restaurants and shop at local stores, the study showed.

Those are some pretty impressive numbers.

And we know there is a real appetite for arts and culture in York Region.

Just ask the folks at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in Kleinburg, Flato Markham Theatre, or those in the audience at the recent Cel-

ebration of the Arts, held at the Newmarket Theatre, honouring our newest and brightest young talents.

Stouffville's own Nineteen on the Park and local art galleries also offer vibrant proof that arts and culture are alive and well in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

And then there are the countless local musicians — and music fans — who enjoy all kinds of music at churches, bars, coffee houses and the Legion.

This is clearly an opportunity the town, investment and business community, as well as citizens, should jump on.

For example, a municipality could put aside seed money for an intimate performing arts centre in its emerging downtown or provide the funding to help launch an international arts and music festival such as Glastonbury 2014, which takes place at Worthy Farm in the English countryside.

All 120,000 tickets were sold-out in record-setting time and Canadians alone racked up a whopping \$40 million in ticket sales. It is easy to see the enormous benefits hosting such a festival would bring to the community.

Or why not put a sizable sum into a special fund dedicated to providing major, annual grants to local festival organizers, arts and culture organizations and emerging artists?

Someone once said the arts are an even better measurement of what is happening in our communities than the stock market or, say, the debates happening in political circles.

If our council wants to build an even more vibrant town — and potentially grow and strengthen the local economy, too — a good thing to consider is ramping up spending on arts and culture.

**BOTTOM LINE: Investment in local arts, culture deserves more money, attention.**

## HOT TOPIC

### Ovation given delightful play

*Re: Disturbing moments for students in play, letter by Wendy Bacola, Oct. 25.*

My husband and I attended a wonderful performance of *Alice* by the Motus O Dance Company at Nineteen on the Park, where they received a standing ovation from a sold-out audience of approximately 120 adults and children.

After the performance, many of the young people who attended spent another half hour taking photographs of themselves with the dancers.

I find it extremely difficult to understand how Mrs. Bacola could interpret this delightful, light-hearted performance in such a disturbing way.

The audience on Friday night certainly was not of the same opinion.

I also find it difficult to understand why this newspaper would print such a mean-spirited attack on the dance company, who have contributed so much to Whitchurch-Stouffville and the surrounding communities through its art and desire to engage adults and children of all ages.

Surely there is some editorial discretion in deciding what is fit to print.

RUTH AND ANDY PATTERSON  
STOUFFVILLE

### Children's smiles during play heartwarming

*Re: Disturbing moments for students in play, letter by Wendy Bacola, Oct. 25.*

As a member of the audience of Motus O's *Alice* last Wednesday, I was astounded to read this writer's interpretation of the play.

The costumes of Tweedledee and Tweedledum were, to my mind, designed to exaggerate the rotund bodies of the characters and not to display "over-sized genitals".

The donning of the mini skirt was to represent one of the characters pretending to be a girl so that the duo could show *Alice* how to dance. A little wiggle as the skirt was taken off ... simply a little fun by a male oversized Tweedledum to encourage the laughter it received.

The play's conclusion portrayed a smiling *Alice* on her own swing looking wistfully around, recalling her very strange dream. The rabbit? No longer there and certainly not capable of tormenting her.

I would like to compliment Motus O on its community spirit — the smiles of glee on the faces of Harry Bowes Public School children was heartwarming.

How many children have the opportunity to perform on stage with professionals in front of their parents and peers?

VALERIE CURGENVEN  
LEMONVILLE

### Amazing talent shouldn't draw criticism

*Re: Disturbing moments for students in play, letter by Wendy Bacola, Oct. 25.*

Concerning the wonderful production of *Alice* that Motus O brought us this weekend, the writer complained about innuendo making it inappropriate for children.

First, the costumes of Tweedledee and Tweedledum were full of imagination, but I fail to see what the writer saw.

The actions of James and Jack were wonderfully childlike, full of fun and innocence, again making me wonder how the writer saw more.

Children love to see someone fall down and we know they are safe when falling because they are so padded.

When Jack's skirt came down, the children sitting near me loved it; they love it when pants fall off. This is such an old version of comedy.

When attending theatre, I feel it is more fun to allow the troupe to entertain you rather than find moments to criticize.

I told Motus O representatives following Friday night's show it was perfect.

Each time they bring us something, I am amazed at the talent.

The costumes, rhythm, make-up, action and ability to tell a story with few words is astounding.

DIANE WARD  
NEWMARKET

### We can all use more laughter

*Re: Disturbing moments for students in play, letter by Wendy Bacola, Oct. 25.*

I was at the *Alice* performance Friday night at Nineteen on the Park and I thought it gave much laughter and enjoyment to so many people.

The letter writer's comments are overly exaggerated and seem to turn humour into bad behaviour — taking a good thing and turning it into something bad and negative.

Many of us were still talking about the performance the next day. It was great clean fun for so many of us.

It is sad negative people feel the need to take humour and laughter and destroy it.

There was absolutely nothing sexual about the *Alice* performance.

Motus O, keep up that good work and thank you for giving us that moment of laughter, as we all could use more laughter in our lives.

HELEN LANGENHUIZEN  
UXBRIDGE