

Organizers of Culture Days invite public's participation

It's official now. Culture Days in Ontario will take place Sept. 24-26, in sync with similar efforts in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Québec, Saskatchewan and other provinces and territories.

The aim is to create something all too rare: a truly national, citizen-focused movement. The focus is on arts and culture in the broadest sense.

The purpose is to raise the awareness, accessibility, participation and engagement by all Canadians in the arts and cultural life of their communities.

In Quebec, the last Friday, Saturday and Sunday in September have been *les Journées de la culture* since 1997.

Serious interest in developing a cross-Canadian project built on the Quebec model began in 2006.

A communique informing Canadians that something like this is in the works and "advancing towards lift-off" went out last October. After that, things were quiet for months on end, to the point where many of us began to think that perhaps the announcement had been premature.

Today, the movement is picking up steam, especially here in Ontario, where a large and diverse provincial task force is in place, which includes Genevieve Twomey, executive director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony and Betty Anne Keller, manager of



Martin DeGroot
Arts and Culture

cultural development for the City of Waterloo.

Over the last few weeks, an official call for participation has started going out to artists, cultural organizations and communities across the province. The invitation is to provide opportunities for the public to engage in cultural activities of all kinds. The offerings have to be free, open to all and include an interactive or participatory element.

Beyond that, the possibilities are endless.

The call explains that Culture Days in Ontario is meant to be "an opportunity to spark people's interest in the vibrant culture in Ontario communities ... (and) encourage people to explore their own creativity.

Various examples of possible activities are cited, including demonstrations, lectures, workshops, "behind the scenes" tours, open studios, public rehearsals, contests and collective creations.

The Ontario Task Force has declared an intention to build on the experience of comparable initiatives such as Doors Open Ontario and the Ontario Arts Council pilot project *spOtligh*t, which, of course, is of special

interest here because Cambridge, Waterloo, Kitchener, Guelph, Stratford and area was chosen as the testing ground for *spOtligh*t in 2008 and 2009.

Also modelled on *Journées de la culture*, *spOtligh*t stands as an important precursor for Canada Days Ontario.

The big difference is that *spOtligh*t included a modest budget for projects, and was tied to Ontario's status of the artist legislation, and therefore dedicated to the principle that artistic work deserves fair remuneration.

Culture Days, in contrast, promises some promotional support, but participants are expected to provide or secure all other resources themselves. That's a serious limitation, to be sure.

This is, nevertheless, an unprecedented opportunity to reach out to all Canadians and invite them to make arts, culture and heritage part of their lives.

Any individual or group that wants to register an event can do so at www.culturedays.ca/en.

For more information, go to on@culturedays.ca or call the Ontario Arts Council at 1-800-387-0058, ext. 7575. Or, you can call Betty Anne Keller at 519-747-8585 or email her at BettyAnne.Keller@waterloo.ca

Martin DeGroot is executive director of the Waterloo Regional Arts Council. He comments on arts and culture Saturdays in The Record. You can reach him by email at mdg@golden.net.