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Culture and Community Spirit Minister Lindsay Blackett speaks at the official announcement of Alberta Arts Days 2010 at the Arden Theatre.

Arts to shine in St. Albert

Arden Theatre one of five arts festival venues

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St. Albert is an influential breeding ground for innovative artists that have stepped into national and international arenas.

The feeling of pride has largely been contained within the community, yet yesterday Lindsay Blackett, Minister of Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, took a large step in recognizing the city's cultural expertise.

At a media conference, Blackett announced that the Arden Theatre is one of five cultural facilities his department has formed a special partnership with for Alberta Arts Days. The other four are Lethbridge's Yates Memorial Theatre, Grande Prairie's Prairie Art Gallery, Red Deer's Bower Pond Stage and Banff Centre.

"We're thrilled," said St. Albert Cultivates the Arts Festival (StArts) co-chairs Peter Moloney and Nancy Watt in unison.

Alberta Arts Days is the provincial umbrella that celebrates the arts from Sept. 17 to 19. It includes the StArts Festival, an event featuring an awards night and free local activities for the public.

An articulate booster of the arts, Blackett likened the province's cultural contributions to "a renaissance," and strongly praised the large artistic showing at the Vancouver Olympics. "We're bold and creative leaders. We have more than just cowboy hats and country bands."

However, Blackett stopped short of making any extra monetary commitments to Alberta Arts Days outside of the \$700,000 previously approved, an equal amount to the 2009 budget. Only the five host centres will be

eligible for a one-time Community Initiatives Program grant up to a maximum of \$75,000. “They assured us they will work to make that part happen,” Moloney said.

Blackett also encouraged the five participating facilities to reach out at the grassroots level and partner with schools, libraries, organizations and the non-profit sector.

Culture Days

Also on hand was Sarah Iley, vice-president of programming at the Banff Centre and member of a steering committee for Culture Days. She introduced Culture Days as a new national event that invites everyone to toast arts and culture. “We want to explore the breadth and diversity around us,” she said.

For the first time this year, Culture Days spreads its wings coast-to-coast on Sept. 24 to 26 as the largest-ever collective campaign to celebrate the arts. The only exception is Alberta hosting its arts festivities one week earlier.

All cities and community arts groups can log on to the national calendar at www.culturedays.ca and list their activities for exposure. “It really promotes arts and culture across Canada in a unified way,” Moloney added.

For more information visit www.albertaartsdays.ca.

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