

Notable AX

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Jane Simpson, Executive Director, AX
Bonny Hill, Board of Directors, AX

Thanks to Bonny Hill for this week's guest column – AX is so fortunate to have Bonny as a Board Member. Bonny has taught visual arts in New Brunswick high schools for thirty years and has been recognized by the Canadian Society for Education Through Art as "Art Educator of the Year". Though many of us know Bonny as a dedicated arts educator and volunteer, she is also a professional practicing artist and was recently included in the Lord Beaverbrook Art Gallery's Studio Watch: Emerging Artists Series for 2016. Bonny's devotion to her family and community are second to none, and most of us have benefited in some way from her tireless efforts to nurture arts and culture offerings in our region. Thanks for your constant work and for this guest column, Bonny!

Hats off to everyone who contributed to the recently-unveiled economic development strategy for Sussex and Hampton area. Clearly, we're open for business and attracting attention. AX is poised to play an important role with arts and culture, a major priority in the plan, and AX's volunteers and board members are excited about taking on the challenge.

With improvements in technology, more and more families, singles, and retired folk are able to choose where they want to live and are making choices around quality of life. Many are thinking about trading their million dollar bungalows for affordable land and housing, trading their long commutes, heavy traffic, impossible parking and outrageous daycare costs for a slower-paced lifestyle among beautiful landscapes populated by friendly people.

While cities offer some attractions that aren't found in Sussex, most things are available within a one-hour drive, and let's face it: the big box stores in NB have the same goods as the ones in Toronto or Vancouver, the same movie theatres are playing the same films, and the fast food menus are identical. Sussex residents who wish to access resources in Moncton, Saint John, and Fredericton can easily do so, but as the only town in New Brunswick with 500,000 residents within a radius of 100 km, Sussex needs to share the reasons for people to come to us: to shop here, to enjoy arts and culture here, to do business here, to ski and golf here, to visit often, and to move here.

Great towns don't just happen. They're built. Let's build a town that we'll be proud to show off and that we'll leave in great shape for our children. AX, the Arts and Culture Centre of Sussex, is one piece of this vision.

In addition to supporting visual arts, literary arts, and cultural events, AX is committed to promoting theatre. We're fortunate to have a beautiful community theatre in our town at the Sussex Regional High School. It recently enjoyed a complete renovation, thanks in large part to Phyllis Corbett, Cathy Healy, and Colleen deWinter. Sussex audiences have enjoyed many years of excellent theatre performances in this space: over 30 years

of SRHS spring musicals, Class Act shows, Kidstuff Theatre and Sussex Corner Elementary School plays under the direction of Tammy Morris.

Saint John Theatre Company has added Sussex to its touring schedule for 2017. "Of Mice and Men" was debuted in Sussex recently and performed for SRHS and Belleisle Regional High school students studying the novel free of charge.

Anyone who has been involved in a theatre production realizes the volunteer time required to put together a successful show. As opening night for *Grease* nears, and as my final year of directing reaches an end, I want to thank the many hard working, talented women who are 'retiring' with me, especially Sheri Smidt and Phyllis Corbett, who've been the driving force for so many years. Our dream is to have the strong theatre tradition live on after we leave. Let's continue to work together to build a town where community theatre is enjoyed and valued.

Tickets are on sale now at Sobeys and the SRHS office for this year's SRHS spring musical, "Grease", April 11, 12, 13 and 15.