

**Notable AX**  
**For KCR, May 16, 2017 edition**  
**Jane Simpson, Executive Director, AX**

I've just come home from a once-in-a-lifetime writing retreat overseas, led by local author Gerard Collins. There were 18 of us in the group – most were from New Brunswick, but some came from Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Florida as well. This was my first time visiting Ireland, and along with a lot of wonderful memories, I've returned with a greater sense of how and why we need arts and culture in our daily lives. I've also come to see that Sussex is already doing a lot of what's needed to integrate arts and culture into our community, which includes the creation of AX.

One of the most striking features of Dublin is the architecture. There's an obvious desire to embrace the future, but it's been tempered with a strong commitment to the past. Historically significant buildings such as the General Post Office (site of the 1916 Easter Rising), Dublin Castle, and Trinity College are just some examples of what makes the city uniquely "Dublin." Though many of the buildings over there are much older than what we have here, Dubliners' commitment toward preservation had to start somewhere, and Sussex has proof of our own commitment to tradition – in fact, we don't need to look any farther than the AX building itself. While it's being renovated to serve a modern purpose, with a climate-controlled, secure gallery, and bright new art studios, the renovation is being done in a way that preserves the historic look and feel of the building.

I spoke recently with James Sackville of BDA Landscape Architects, and he told me about some of the historic elements that have been incorporated into the AX building over the years. The gorgeous hardwood flooring was originally reclaimed from a turn-of-the-century school in Moncton – it's currently being gently sanded and protected. The large wooden doors that marked the entrance to the Don Stiles Museum will now mark the entrance to the gallery section – these doors came from the parlour of the Pearn residence on Church Avenue, salvaged from the barn and generously donated by Robert and Nancy MacLeod.

There was evidence of cultural "cross-pollination" in Ireland as well, where businesses truly embraced the arts. We happened to arrive in Galway on International Poetry Day. The streets were filled with buskers – even a poetry busker, believe it or not – and local shops threw their doors wide open to take in the sights and sounds and invite people in. While it might be on a smaller scale, Sussex's community piano demonstrates a similar appreciation of music and visual art and encourages public engagement.

While we were looking for a place to get a cup of tea in Galway, we came upon a chocolate shop that served hot drinks. The shop had a stack of postcards with poems written by locals, and if you were willing to read one of these poems aloud to the waitress (which I did), she was all too happy to hand out a chocolate truffle (which I devoured) in exchange. The murals that grace several businesses around Sussex show yet another way to integrate art and commerce. These beautiful, visual histories are the

envy of many communities and a big draw for visitors, and they demonstrate our commitment to keeping the arts front and centre in our lives.

I also had the chance to visit England and took the train from London to Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. We caught the train at the historic London King's Cross Station, opened in 1852 and the inspiration for author J.K. Rowling's fictional "Platform 9¾", where Harry Potter caught the train to Hogwarts, a school of magic. There's a plaque in the train station, between platforms 9 and 10, that honours Rowling's reference, alongside a busy shop for fans of the Harry Potter series. Our own beautiful train station, built in 1913, has retained its historic character while housing an ice cream parlour, the tourism information centre, and museum spaces.

It's the sum of the parts that makes these cities, and our own town, so vibrant. There's so much to learn from historic and culturally active European cities, but Sussex is already well on its way and has been for a long while, and a public arts and culture centre is more evidence of the region's choice to keep the arts at the forefront, every day.