

Unique atmosphere as culture honoured

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Editor

“We’ve got an atmosphere that goes on in this community that, I don’t know, it’s hard to find anywhere else.”

Those words from Mayor George Fontaine helped ring in the second edition of Culture Days last Friday, Sept. 30.

And over the course of three memorable days, they would prove to be quite astute.

The Flin Flon area’s vibrant arts scene exploded into a rich mosaic of cultural activity as hundreds celebrated the creative customs that define us as northerners.

“My lasting memory of the weekend is, I would have to say, just the diverse community interaction,” said Crystal Kolt, cultural coordinator of the Flin Flon Arts Council, the organizing body. “It was everything. The seniors with the children and the parents relaxing while their children

played, and professionals on the stage with newcomers, and visitors from The Pas performing with Flin Flonners. That’s what Culture Days is all about to me, is just celebrating everything. Anybody who wants to celebrate it, celebrate it.”

Held in Flin Flon and Bakers Narrows, Culture Days featured 40-plus events starting with the opening ceremonies at what promises to be a new hub of culture in the community, Pioneer Square.

The beat of an animal-skin drum sounded as two aboriginal drumming groups from Cranberry Portage – The Whispering Loons and Cranberry Birch Drummers – took to the concrete stage.

Most of the festivities Saturday took place at Bakers Narrows, behind Bakers Narrows Lodge.

In the Miner’s Tent, Jane Merasty, an 84-year-old aboriginal elder, shared a short documentary film in which she

Called “It’s Getting Easier,” the film was first shown at the 2009 Native American Film and Video Festival in New York City.

Humorous short

A humorous short, it follows the Flin Flon woman’s discovery of new home-cleaning technologies, starting with the broom and ending with the vacuum cleaner.

At the Jubilee Hall, set up in a much larger wedding-style tent, workshops and performances abounded. Mask-making, recycled art, hoop dancers and a drumming circle were among the highlights.

Many local musicians also took to the Jubilee Hall stage, including the Coppertones children’s choir, giving the weekend a strong musical element.

Out on the vast open green space, Mayor Fontaine showed how kayaks are constructed. And bubble expert Laurence Gillespie, of the Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corporation,

entertained a clientele of children with his bubble-blowing tricks and contraptions.

Inside a nearby tipi, traditional aboriginal forms of expression, such as caribou-hair tufting and beading, were taught.

The past played such an important role in Culture Days that participants could have sworn they saw late mayor Jack Freedman roaming around with his cigar and plaid jacket.

In fact it was Freedman, as portrayed by long-time resident Greg McBratney.

Three other community pioneers were spotted in Lila Judd (played by Penny Grove), the first stenographer at HBMS; Judy Judd (Susan Lethbridge), Flin Flon’s first nurse; and Bill Baker (Bruce Murray), a trapper and prospector for whom Bakers Narrows is named.

Including these figures was important to Kolt.

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Remembering our heritage and celebrating arts

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"I was starting to worry that we're losing our stories and we're losing our knowledge of our heritage," she said. "There are just such colourful characters (who are)...worth remembering. And so that's part of Culture Days, remembering your heritage as well as celebrating your arts and culture."

Over at the NorVa Centre on Green Street, two special exhibits were held: a traveling exhibit from Winnipeg called "Personal Politics" and a photo exhibit produced by the Grade 10 photography class at Hapnot Collegiate.

"They're fascinating," said Sarah Trevor, president of the centre, of the photos.

"The students are doing very powerful work and it's really wonderful to have it exposed."

One of the truly unique events came early Sunday afternoon as roughly 100 people danced their way down Main St. to the backdrop of "Let's Go Higher," a song by Johnny Reid that is as uplifting as it is catchy.

Dance

Before following behind an RCMP escort, participants, including Kolt herself, spent time at Pioneer Square learning the dance from instructors Cheryl Anderson and Heather Hammond.

The gloomy sky overhead did nothing to dampen the dancers' enthusiasm as they smiled brightly and flailed their

arms toward the sky with delight.

An open exhibit at the NorVa Centre and a film festival at Hapnot rounded out the final day of events Sunday.

While just as well-received as last year's debut event, this year's Culture Days were held on a budget of just \$7,500, less

than one-third of the amount spent in 2010.

Kolt said many of the grants secured last year can only be awarded to the same organization once every two years.

But sponsors stepped up to the plate to ensure the festivities went off without a hitch.

"Every organization

that I asked, helped in one way or the other," said Kolt. "So that just shows you what kind of community we have."

Culture Days events took place in communities across Canada over the weekend, but for many, the festivities in Flin Flon stood out.

In a piece on the

nationwide Culture Days phenomenon, *The Globe and Mail* mentioned four of the Flin Flon events – tipi teachings, caribou-hair tufting, beading and the Main St. dance.

"Which is amazing when you think of all the different activities that are happening across Canada," said Kolt.



PHOTOS BY JONATHON NAYLOR

Dawn Cardell of the Flin Flon Aboriginal Friendship Centre with some aboriginal artifacts on display at Bakers Narrows.

Left: Renowned local musician Mark Kolt brought his accordion, among other instruments, to the festivities.