

Cheryl Ewing



The Waterloo arts community owes much to a professional dance company that inspired a shy teenager many years ago. Cheryl Ewing recalls the performance was a pivotal experience that motivated her to become a tireless supporter of the arts.

“She has a well-deserved reputation as a genuine overall arts supporter,” said an official with the City of Waterloo. She’s a very versatile and talented person. She’s done it all.”

Ewing has been the force behind many arts initiatives including the wildly popular, eyeGO to the Arts, a programme that supports high school students who want to attend live performances but can’t afford the steep ticket prices. eyeGO to the Arts sells tickets to students for a flat rate of \$5. “It’s giving students an opportunity to experience and explore the arts, so their interest is an emotional investment rather than a financial one,” Ewing said once.

Ewing was also a founding partner of Brava! Special Events and Arts Management, a business that works with arts groups in the non-profit and educational sectors. By helping small organizations with administration and audience development, Ewing worked to keep the local arts community diverse and vital.

As a Brava! partner Ewing branched out into event planning, an exciting offshoot that used her skills in theatre. For a University of Waterloo alumni night, Brava! turned the party room into a storm scene complete with flying cups and candelabra and rain puddles on the floor.

Ewing, who won a K-W Arts Award in 1998, is also well known as the person behind the successful Waterloo Busker Carnival. The Busker Carnival has been an annual favourite for residents who watch street performers juggle everything from fire to machetes and perform amazing acrobatic stunts. Ewing also served as the cultural programs associate for the City of Waterloo between 1996 and 1999. “There’s a huge sense of satisfaction... when you look around and see thousands of people having a really good time. I love that,” she said.

Her wealth of experience also includes a stint as the executive director of the Waterloo Regional Arts Council and general manager of the Elora Festival: A Celebration of Song. She has also been active in theatre as an actress, stage manager and director. In the mid-1980s she helped establish an amateur theatre group called Starlight Theatre.

In all of her positions, Ewing has tried to stress that investment in the arts stimulates the local economy. She once estimated that every dollar spent on the arts generates an additional \$5 in the community. “The true value, however, cannot be measured financially. The arts impact every person’s life every single day.”

Although Ewing left Brava! in 2006 to concentrate on other audience development initiatives, she still loves the excitement of being involved with arts organizations and

live performances. Ewing commented that the “development of a new and wonderful idea into reality creates an excitement” that keeps her young and deeply engaged in the community. “The be-prepared-for-anything (adage) is very true,” she said. “To be successful in this area, you have to roll with changes . . . We are challenge-addicted.”

Aside from financial incentives, she is a strong believer in art for “art’s sake.” Her own career has been motivated by her love for theatre and dance rather than financial rewards. Her advice to future arts consultants: “Be prepared to work long hours for little financial reward but an amazing sense of satisfaction.”

Photo courtesy of Dean Palmer of the scenario