

artsScene Ottawa – it's a win-win future!

BY LIZ MCKEEN

“It’s a natural marriage. Young professional and business people have energy, talent, and an interest in the arts, but lead busy lives and may not know how to get involved in the arts. Artists are looking for audiences and supporters. artsScene Ottawa brokers a marriage of the two groups,” says Adam Brown. Director of Arts Community Outreach for the fledgling artsScene Ottawa, Adam waxes eloquent: “The Glebe has its fair share of young professionals. A younger cohort is moving in – and the Glebe is known for its strong sense of community. That’s what artsScene Ottawa is all about – we’re trying to build arts community. We want to develop leadership in the arts by engaging young professionals, get them joining boards of directors, get them engaged in the arts for life.” Adam himself personifies the blending of arts and leadership that artsScene Ottawa is working to foster. A professor of biology and science communication at the University of Ottawa, he is a member and co-founder of the Maple Morris dancers who is also active in folk music and folk theatre.

Ottawa is a unique arts ‘playing field’ because it’s both a national capital and a vibrant city. It has everything from grassroots arts and music to national institutions such as the National Arts Centre and the National Gallery. artsScene Ottawa’s goal is to develop the next generation of arts leaders at all levels, and build the Ottawa arts infrastructure for the future. It’s a bold vision. “The baby boomer generation has succeeded in fostering a vibrant arts community in this city. The challenge for artsScene Ottawa is to find ways to pass the torch to the next generation, so that Ottawa’s arts scene can be sustained and grow into the future,” says Adam.

artsScene Ottawa, a not-for-profit organization, began in the spring of 2010, with its first full year of operation in 2011. It has organized a number of events aimed at engaging young Ottawa and Gatineau professionals. While targeting people between the ages of 18 and 40, events, though open to all, offer an art experience with an added personal dimension: face-to-face contact with working artists and a chance to talk to them about their work. This richer, more satisfying experience fosters a strong sense of engagement in the



artsScene Ottawa “behind the scenes” at the National Gallery, April 2011.

arts. For example, at the Canada Dance Festival (CDF) opening at the NAC in June, artsScene Ottawa ticket-holders had an opportunity to go backstage and meet the artists after a dance performance. Jennifer Fornelli of CDF is enthusiastic. “We were very pleased to have partnered with artsScene Ottawa for our opening night. Their members are enthusiastic about the arts and were very keen to participate. We look forward to continuing our partnership with artsScene Ottawa in 2012. It’s important to build strong partnerships with the business leaders in our city.” artsScene Ottawa also held a behind-the-scenes ‘meet and greet’ with curators at the National Gallery, a ‘chefs as artists’ event with Cordon Bleu, and art gallery receptions.

artsScene Ottawa’s boardLink evenings make it fun for young people to meet representatives of boards of directors of a variety of arts organizations. Run like speed dating, participants move from one table to the next when a bell rings. Adam comments “It’s a great way for young professionals to get matched up with a compatible arts organization, so they can join the board. It takes the mystery out of boards of directors, and it looks great on your curriculum vitae. It’s win-win!” Enriching arts boards contributes to the arts community and develops the arts leadership of tomorrow, further “blossoming the flower.” According to Diane Obam Dallaire, artsScene Ottawa’s director of Event Planning/Support and Network Development, “Our first boardLink event was attended by several key art organiza-

tions such as the Canada Dance Festival, Arts Court Ottawa, Théâtre de la Catapulte, and the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra. It is too early for us at this stage to quantify the impact of boardLink on the recruitment of new board members of local art organizations. Nevertheless, through boardLink, we are able to further strengthen a partnership with the cultural and art establishment in the region.”

artsScene Ottawa’s board of directors, a group of young Ottawa professionals of diverse backgrounds and interests, has its sights set on partnering in the coming year with organizations such as the Art Bank, Axenéo7 in Gatineau, the Museum of Nature and the Museum of Civilization, and the Governor General’s literacy program. Diane reports that artsScene Ottawa is now planning an event in October in conjunction with the Ottawa Sport and Social Club (OSSC) and the Ottawa School of Art. The enthusiastic members of this new organization are also looking to hold a future symposium on the state of art and culture in the region, and to continue promoting involvement of young business leaders in the arts. A smorgasbord of challenges awaits them.

Note: artsScene Ottawa is an initiative of the national organization Business for the Arts. Further information, including upcoming event details, is available at artssceneottawa.com.

Long time Glebe resident Liz McKeen has volunteered as a proof-reader and copyeditor and recently joined the board of directors of the Glebe Report.