



Request for Appeal re. Community Grant for 2024



PLAYMAKERS! THEATRE SCHOOL

Playmakers! Theatre School has been running programs and events in Stratford since 1993, including the Ghosts of Stratford Theatrical Walking Tours, the Stratford Children's Shakespeare Festival and the Stratford Lantern Parade.

All of these programs and events were severely impacted by the pandemic in 2020-2022. Nevertheless, since the summer of 2023 Playmakers! Theatre School has experienced a significant increase in interest in our programs and events. Classes and workshops have been well-enrolled and attendance at the annual Lantern Parade has grown to nearly 3000. During our 2023-24 season we were proud to have been supported by more than 60 volunteers who shared approximately 2700 hours of their time and talents with us.

Participation in communal celebrations – especially celebrations that are both physically and financially accessible – is known to enhance the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Arts and culture activities have a demonstrated connection with overall health and well-being. Community cultural experiences provide a positive focus, bonding everyone in the present moment and building a sense of shared identity.



Since its founding in 2017 a primary goal of the Stratford Lantern Parade has been physical and financial accessibility for participants. Although we request Pay-What-You-Can donations for some activities (lantern-building/decorating) and some experiences (the Labyrinth of Light), most of the installations and entertainment can be enjoyed free of charge. Sites along Stratford's beautiful riverside parkland are wheelchair accessible. Children and pets are welcome and participate safely.



All of this has resulted in a "shoulder season" event that is anticipated and attended by thousands of people each year, including visitors from beyond our region who patronize local shops and restaurants during their visit and may stay in local accommodation overnight. There is no comparable event closer than Toronto.

We believe this event has great potential for growth. Comparable events have many thousands of participants: the lantern parade in Lismore, Australia (population 45,000), which began in 1994 and was produced by a handful of local artists and performers, now attracts approximately 30,000 people each year and is estimated to contribute \$3.4 million to the local economy.

Since the first lantern event in 2017, we have partnered with many local artists, businesses and non-profit groups, including Off the Wall Artists Alliance, Gallery Stratford and the Stratford Perth Museum. Funding has been received from the Destination Development Fund, Regional Tourism Ontario (4), Stratford Perth Community Foundation and the City of Stratford. The





event has been featured in promotional material for RTO4 and Ontario Culture Days. In 2023 we launched a sponsorship program which we plan to expand again this year; however, we are aware that local businesses are still feeling the pinch of the pandemic so we do not (yet) view sponsorship as the main financial pillar of the event.

The theme for this year's Lantern Parade is "Light up the Future: Illuminating Youth Arts in Stratford" and we have a long list of local organizations, schools and businesses to approach as event partners. We will be asking partners to contribute volunteer support in return for an opportunity to showcase and promote their programs and activities. This will undoubtedly have the effect of bringing more participants to the event; however, it will

contribute nothing toward fair compensation for the professional artists and entertainers we hope to involve in creating the Lantern Parade experience in 2024.

We fear that support from the City of Stratford in the amount of only \$1000 for an event that will be offered for the sixth time (in 8 years) and now brings out 2500-3000 participants each year does not represent a major vote of confidence from our home town and may seem underwhelming to other funding bodies we approach for support. This amount also comes nowhere near providing any significant support for attracting and retaining the local artists and artisans we would like to involve creatively in the event – which was the purpose of our application for a Community Grant this year.



We were very grateful to receive our first Community Grant of \$1,000 in 2016. This grant generously funded tuition assistance for 5 students in our theatre education programs that season. Support in the amount of \$1,000/year for the Stratford Lantern Parade – an event which attracts 2500-3000 participants (and likely more in 2024) – seems disappointing by comparison.

We hope Council will increase this year's Community Grant for the sixth annual Stratford Lantern Parade. We cannot express how strongly we believe in the potential of this event to grow over the coming years, providing a unique opportunity for our community to come together in celebration as well as a point of destination attraction for visitors to Stratford. We look forward to receiving support from the City in an amount comparable to other community

celebrations, that is \$8000-\$10000 per year.

Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Best regards,

Susan J. Kennedy

Susan J. Kennedy
Artistic Director

Playmakers! Theatre School
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Ghosts of Stratford Theatrical Walking Tours

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