

Celebrating creative connections in Bancroft



By Tony Pearson

Bancroft has a reputation for fostering artistic endeavours. Last week, a number of newly minted "cultural creatives" assembled at York River public school to put together a music video of an original, Bancroft-born song.

The initiative, entitled "Celebrating Creative Connections", was put together by Shelley King, a puppeteer and workshop facilitator. She formulated a proposal to the Ontario Arts Council to blend a number of artistic talents into a learning experience based around the creation of a music video.

Genie award-winning singer-songwriter Mary Milne kicked off the project with a workshop which saw the group, ranging in age from eight to 50, produce "And birds will sing our song", a folk-oriented tune celebrating our links with each other and nature. After that, professional dancer and instructor Kyla Kowalski led a workshop called "Music in Motion", which choreographed the dance for the song. Then visual artist Ketha Neuman took a baker's dozen of multi-generation participants in the building and painting of the masks, props, and the mural for the video. Finally, Paudash resident (via Alberta and Vancouver) Sean Buk, technical manager of WordBird Media, brought his 20 years of experience to a workshop on film-making; this crew recorded the performers and will put together the final DVD.

One significant aspect of the project was the strong involvement of developmentally-delayed youth and young adults from the North Hastings Community Integration Association in the dance segment. In fact, the NHCIA was the lead agency in the project. Dance director Kyla Kowalski said emphatically: "It has been such a privilege to work with this group. I've taught dance for a number of years, and normally I work with people who have dance experience. But the crew from Community Integration has really broadened my ideas about movement, and how people can express themselves physically in harmony with music. Even though I'm the teacher, I have learned so much from them."

Shelley King pronounced the project a success, which will help build a greater sense of community in North Hastings. "The arts present an ideal way to bring people together, because they offer the opportunity to learn from one another and create as a group," King stated. "And when you can offer an arts project that brings together people new to each other together, who are from all ages and levels of ability, we come to appreciate the unique diversity of our community. From this greater understanding, our area gains a stronger sense of compassion, and individuals gain a greater sense of belonging." The final result of the collaboration will come in Maynooth on Mar. 24, when the Arlington will host the launch of the DVD, featuring the performance of "And birds will sing our song", as well as a documentary on the project.