

Celebration of Nations receives national award

Oct. 5, 2023 – The City of St. Catharines and FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre (PAC) have been nationally recognized for Celebration of Nations gathering of Indigenous arts, culture and heritage. They jointly accepted a Cultural Event Award from the Creative City Network of Canada (CCNC) alongside the gathering’s Artistic Director, Michele-Elise Burnett and Artistic Producer, Tim Johnson at the 2023 Creative Cities Summit in St. John’s, Newfoundland on Thursday afternoon.

Celebration of Nations is held annually at the PAC in early September. The weekend gathering offers a unique blend of both traditional and contemporary Indigenous perspectives. Local residents and visitors can reflect on an Elder’s shared wisdom by the Sacred Fire as the sun rises, try their hand at a traditional craft, get a better sense of the lived Indigenous experience through poetry, song, dance and film, taste Indigenous foods, cultivate new perspectives and support meaningful reconciliation.

“The FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre is incredibly grateful for our many community partnerships, with the City of St. Catharines being at the core of our valued collaborators. When Celebration of Nations first began in 2017 the City supported all aspects of the gathering unconditionally, understanding the need to step up in our collective efforts towards truth and reconciliation. At the time, the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre fell under the Department of Community, Recreation and Culture Services and the entire team rallied together to produce one of the first arts and culture gatherings inspired by the Two Wampum Agreement. Since the initial gathering, Celebration of Nations continues to be a source of pride for local leaders, city staff, councillors and community members while inspiring other similar gatherings from coast to coast to coast.” said FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre CEO Colleen A. Smith.

The Two Row Wampum Agreement promotes all Nations walking together, in parallel, with respect, compassion and understanding to cultivate an inclusive community for a shared future.

“Celebration of Nations is a successful model of a partnership between the PAC and leadership from the Indigenous community and it has had an astoundingly positive impact on the social cohesion of our community.” added Mayor Mat Siscoe.

The CCNC Awards of Excellence are presented annually to celebrate the outstanding achievements of Canadian municipalities in cultural programming.

“The programmatic oeuvre that defines Celebration of Nations is located in the fusion of Indigenous expressive arts and intellectual engagement. Its roots reach broadly across the community and deep through several decades of work in the field of Indigenous

studies, publishing, education, and programming, including elements promulgated at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. This commitment to excellence, with the intent of bridging knowledge and understanding between all peoples, is central to this effort and, I believe, deserving of this wonderful recognition." explained Celebration of Nations Artistic Producer, Tim Johnson.

The Celebration of Nations partnership also includes Kakekalanicks Arts Consultancy – an arts and consultancy company helping to educate Indigenous art and artists to a broad audience.

"We are grateful for the opportunity to gather as a community at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre to share in the rich beauty and wisdom of Indigenous artists and knowledge keepers. As we enter year seven of this celebration of diverse Indigenous cultures, born out of a visionary collaboration between the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre, the City of St. Catharines and Kakekalanicks, I am proud to see how Celebration of Nations continues to grow a path for the next generation. Every year we reap the rewards of the seeds we have sown as our youth increasingly emerge as the next leaders. Celebration of Nations is our opportunity to harvest this good medicine together." said President of Kakekalanicks Arts Consultancy and Artistic Director of Celebration of Nations, Michele-Elise Burnett.

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