

Orillia summer theatre getting facelift

Opera House general manager has high hopes

By JENNIFER BURDEN PACKET & TIMES

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The Orillia Opera House and the Laughoutloud Association is hoping to revitalize downtown by giving summer theatre in Orillia a much needed facelift.

"Summer theatre was huge until about five years ago when the Sunshine Festival Theatre Company folded," said Krista Storey, general manager of the Orillia Opera House.

Without a consistent summer theatre season to bank on, partnerships between the Opera House and local businesses have been difficult and downtown traffic on production nights has been lacking, said Storey.

"(Summer theatre) is really important for us to help, from an economic perspective, to drive business downtown," she said, adding that the Opera House serves as a link from the lake to the downtown core.

Now that Laughoutloud, a four-person theatre company with plenty of expertise behind them, has been brought on board for the 2010 summer season, theatre packages have flourished, Storey said.

Through Ontario's Lake Country, a destination marketing organization for Orillia and surrounding areas, residents and visitors can purchase theatre packages online, which include one of four shows, accommodation and dinner at participating hotels and restaurants, as well as lunch at the Stephen Leacock Museum.

"It's a real community partnership," said Storey. "We've been able to bring the right people to the table. It's really going to be fantastic."

Maureen Way, general manager of the Stone Gate Inn, one of the partner hotels, said having summer theatre packages available has a big impact on her summer business.

"To me, it made sense to support this initiative," said Way. "It directly feeds my business."

Lisa Thomson-Roop, manager of marketing and public affairs for the Downtown Orillia Management Board, said she is excited for the new theatre packages available to visitors and residents of Orillia because they are right on target with what theatre-goers are looking for.

She added that local business have been waiting for an initiative like this to happen for a while and it will only grow in years to come.

"To have consistent theatre and know you can go to a show all summer long will make a difference," said Thomson-Roop. "It's great news."

Dave Campbell, one of the four producers for Laughoutloud, said that without having a cohesive season in place, it's difficult to make theatre economically viable.

Having served as resident director for the Sunshine Festival Theatre Company in Orillia for their 2003-04 seasons, bringing renowned productions such as Cats and Kiss me Kate to the Opera House, Campbell said he knows what kind of traffic a solid theatre season can bring downtown.

"One dollar spent on theatre comes back three times," he said. "People don't generally run to a show just to do that and go. They make it an evening."

Campbell is hoping that residents of Orillia will take advantage of the upcoming summer theatre season and rediscover downtown.

"I think a lot of people, even in Orillia, forget to come downtown," said Campbell. "You almost need an excuse to come in and visit."

The four shows being presented in the Studio Theatre at the Orillia Opera House by Laughoutloud are: The Judy Garland Story (June 1-19) Married Alive (June 22 - Jul. 17), Suds (Jul. 27 - Aug. 21) and The Radio Show (Sept. 7 - 25.)

Participating hotels in the theatre packages include the Stone Gate Inn, the Best Western Couchiching Inn and Best Western Mariposa Inn & Conference Centre.

Participating restaurants are Era 67 Restaurant & Lounge, Sixteen Front Casual Fine Dining & Lounge, and The Grape and Olive Wine and Martini Bistro.

For more information on theatre packages visit <http://www.ontarioslakecountry.com/>