

## Reminder

### Culture Days 'truly the best one yet'

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The Flin Flon area's vibrant arts scene exploded into a rich mosaic of cultural activity over the weekend as thousands celebrated the creative customs that define us as northerners.

The Third Annual Culture Days was a three-day extravaganza packed with dozens of events showcasing the region and its vast capacity for visual and performance art.

"It was truly the best one yet," said Crystal Kolt, cultural coordinator of the Flin Flon Arts Council, which organized the affair.

Held between Flin Flon and Bakers Narrows, Culture Days featured nearly 80 events beginning on Friday.

A highlight of opening day came at the R.H. Channing Auditorium, where renowned African storyteller Comfort Ero hosted her African Stages performance.

A feast for the eyes and the spirit, the colourful show melded music, dance, masks and traditional costumes to teach insightful life lessons.

"Everybody that went to it was charmed and educated," Kolt said.

Also new to this year's Culture Days was Check Out A Living Book, which paired curious patrons with fascinating residents at the Flin Flon Public Library.

Among the "living books" were Afghanistan war veteran Steve Baschuk, Second World War bride Doreen Harvie and renowned aboriginal sculptor Irvin Head.

Later that night, the "Jubilee Hall" - a heated tent near the Community Hall - hosted a social complete with live music and a projected digital image of Flinty.

Throughout the night, tweets sent to the local Culture Days Twitter account appeared in a speech bubble above Flinty's head - a welcome touch for the intimate crowd.

The lion's share of events came Saturday at Bakers Narrows, where a series of tents shielded crowds from the surprisingly robust late-September sun.

Participants took in artistic workshops - learning the art of aboriginal beadwork and mask-making, for instance - as well as presentations on the history of Flin Flon and how to pan for gold.

Rare vintage

Film archivist James Gordon shared rare vintage footage of Canada's far north, produced by filmmakers hired by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1919.

Bubble expert Laurence Gillespie, of the Flin Flon Neighbourhood Revitalization Corp., entertained a clientele of children with his bubble-blowing tricks and contraptions.

Performances from the Cranberry Portage Aboriginal Drummers, Nemihitowok Hoop Troupe and The Coppertones children's choir, among others, added to the upbeat afternoon atmosphere.

One of the more popular guests at the Bakers Narrows grounds was Gerald Kuehl, the Manitoba artist famous for his intricate pencil drawings of aboriginal elders.

Kuehl's audience felt honoured to hear him speak of his work and travels, but the artist himself was equally humbled to be part of Culture Days.

"I'm actually from the small town of Pinawa (Manitoba) and the amount of talent in Pinawa is huge and the amount of talent in the small town of Flin Flon is huge," he said.

"There are truly gifted people who live in Flin Flon."

Culture Days took on a different feel as Saturday afternoon ceded to Saturday evening.

A range of local musical talents - including familiar names like Debbie Rowe and lesser-knowns like Colin Davis - were nothing short of stellar.

But one of the truly unique events came early Sunday afternoon as well over 100 people danced their way down Main Street to the backdrop of The Veldt, a song by Canadian performer deadmau5.

Before following behind an RCMP escort, participants, including Kolt herself, spent time at Pioneer Square learning the dance from instructor Janelle Hacault.

Under another glorious sky gifted by Mother Nature, the dancers - including a young man dressed as deadmau5 (pronounced "Deadmouse") - smiled brightly and flailed their arms with delight.

Many of the dancers then made their way to the NorVA Centre, where musicians Dave Gunn and Mark Kolt provided their own musical interpretations of various artworks.

Gunn, on the guitar, and Kolt, on a range of instruments including a keyboard, elicited smiles and applause from audience members seated on white plastic chairs.

Sunday evening saw the final event of the weekend, a screening of the 2011 Oscar-nominated Canadian film Monsieur Lazhar.

The dramatic film tells the story of a man hired to replace a Montreal teacher who committed suicide in her classroom.

Crystal Kolt estimated Culture Days carried a budget of nearly \$30,000, with funds coming from grants and donations.

Throughout the weekend, Winnipeg filmmaker James Pashke helped local filmmakers capture the essence of the festivities.

Crystal hopes to place that footage online and share it with the likes of Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore.

"I just want to spread it around so people can see what we're all about," she said.

Last year, Flin Flon shocked the country by accumulating the eighth-most Culture Days events of any community in Canada.

This year, it was reported that Flin Flon moved up two spots to number six - a fact sure to shine an even brighter spotlight on the community's arts scene.

Crystal estimated the nearly 80 events attracted some 5,000 people, but that includes those who went to more than one event.

#### Illustration:

- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Mark Kolt was one with his keyboard Saturday night at Bakers Narrows.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Comfort Ero introduces two masked supporting characters.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Brandon Kolt (centre) joined well over 100 other dancers on Main Street.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / A young man dressed as Deadmau5 in Sunday's Main Street dance.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / The Flon was a hub of music Saturday at Bakers Narrows.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Renowned artist Gerald Kuehl at the NorVA Centre with two of his pieces.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / An animated Flinty was projected inside the Jubilee Tent on Friday night.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / African drumming played a key role in the African Stages show.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Historians Gerry Clark (left) and Doug Evans shared vintage slides of Flin Flon at the library
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Dave Gunn smiles as Mark Kolt shares his musical interpretation of a piece of art.
- Colour Photo: Jonathon Naylor, The Reminder / Karen Clark of the NorVA Centre looks at photographs on display as part of the weekend.

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