



The Arts & Rural Revitalization 10 Communities Where Culture Matters

A BC Rural Centre Case Study Fall 2017

Background: Do Rural Arts Matter?

According to the Creative Cities Network of Canada, municipalities that adopt culture as an industry gain positive economic benefits. Cultural industries create job growth, turn ordinary cities into “destination cities,” create interconnections between arts and business, revitalize urban areas, attract skilled workers, and create spin-off businesses, argues the Network.

This may be the case in our major urban centres — in cities like Victoria , Vancouver, Kelowna, Whitehorse, Edmonton, Regina, Hamilton, Toronto, London, Ottawa, Trois-Rivieres, and Fredricton — all members of the Network. But what about rural BC, and rural regions generally?

Is there evidence that culture may be an effective economic development tool for small towns and rural regions?

To begin to answer this intriguing question, we have scanned North America for examples of festivals and arts initiatives that have shown staying power, and have, to varying degrees, made a significant impact on their host communities. We have selected 10 examples to highlight in this brief case study.

Context

Some of the best data on the impact of the arts and festivals on local economies was compiled almost 15 years ago by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Arts Council.

In an analysis of the economic impact of 97 festivals and events on the Ontario economy, it was concluded Ontario’s festivals and events provide significant economic benefits for the province, both through spending by the festivals themselves and by their visitors. The overall impact of the 97 culture, sports, recreation and community festivals and events studied amounted to nearly \$80 million in economic return to the province’s Gross Domestic Product. The 97 festivals and events also generated over \$30 million in taxes for all levels of government and helped create 2,600 jobs and over \$50 million in wages and salaries. The positive impact of these numbers was especially marked in rural Ontario.

The following chart highlights the breakdown of these key economic impact figures for small, medium, and large festivals and events, including 39 small festivals and events (with expenditures up to \$75,000), 37 medium sized festivals and events (with expenditures between \$75,000 and \$300,000), and 21 large festivals and events (with expenditures over \$300,000). The chart summarizes the impacts of the small, medium, and large festivals and events included in the study.

Economic Impacts of 97 Festivals & Events in Ontario, 2003

	SMALL (< \$75,000 in expenditures)	MEDIUM (\$75,000 — \$300,000)	LARGE (> \$300,000)	TOTAL
Number of festivals & groups	39	37	21	97
GDP impact	\$12,900,000	\$27,500,000	\$38,200,000	\$78,700,000
Wages & salaries	\$8,500,000	\$18,200,000	\$25,500,000	\$52,200,000
Employment (number of jobs)	420	900	1,250	2,570
Taxes	\$5,200,000	\$10,900,000	\$15,000,000	\$31,100,000

While this data is from 2003 and a single province, it is clear that small and medium-sized festivals and events such as the Blue Skies Music Festival in Clarendon, the Deep River Summer Festival, Kapuskaing’s Lumberjack Heritage Festival, and the Eden Mills Writers Festival had, and most likely continue to have a significant economic impact on their host communities.

1. Newfoundland & Labrador Folk Festival

Founded in 1966, run by a volunteer board, this festival’s mandate is the promotion and preservation of the traditional folk arts of Newfoundland & Labrador. The organization presents educational and cultural events that provide artists with the opportunity to showcase their work while engaging youth and the general public in the transmission of Newfoundland’s cultural heritage.

The Festival’s two longest running events, *Folk Night at the Ship Pub* and the Annual Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival are rites of passage for up and coming folk and traditional musicians, and beloved by seasoned performers. Support for young artists is amplified by the annual Young Folk at the Hall concert, and on the Neil Murray stage for young performers at the Festival. Audiences are given the opportunity to engage in celebrating the province’s traditional folk arts by playing along in open jam sessions as well as learning traditional dances, arts and crafts.

2) The Gathering

Also based in Newfoundland, The Gathering is a festival based in the tiny oceanside village of Burlington, celebrating all things *Fire, Food, and Music* administered by 'OME, a local non-profit organization started by Canadian comedian Shaun Majumder that also oversees Hummock View Greens, a sustainable Burlington greenhouse 'Ome Sweet 'Ome, a remote luxury tent “glamping” and guest pod operation, and 'Ome Fry, a chip van that operates locally during the summer months. 'OME's goal is to create social businesses and help fuel an economic engine that will contribute to a new, significant tourism destination on Newfoundland's Baie Verte Peninsula. Profits from The Gathering and these other modest social enterprises are directed toward providing financial support for entrepreneurs in the Burlington-Smith's Harbour-Middle Arm area, along with helping maintain a sustainable micro economy for the region.

While most rural festivals and events have an economic impact on their host communities “without really trying,” 'OME is clear in its intent to use culture as a means to a local economic development end. 'OME hopes to transform the Baie Verte region into a viable tourist destination through the creation of intimate cultural experiences, specifically using The Gathering as a means to both support local musicians, artists, and businesspeople, and provide area residents with an opportunity to celebrate their place — and share that celebration with visitors. With the initial vision of a 5-star hotel, Majumder Manor, getting Burlington to world-class status has been harder than first imagined. The 'Ground Up' pieces of the project involve generation and refining several different elements that start at a critically minimum scale. Hummock View Greens has become essential in food sourcing, as well as growing the social enterprise that is 'OME. On the accommodation side, initially “OmeSweetOme,” will consist of luxury “glamping” tents and remote guest pods. It will also allow us to 'test' the viability of a given site or location for accommodation. The current tents and pod are rich with amenity and allow great comfort to marry with an unfettered connection to nature. The Guest Pods are the smallest scale of new built permanent structures for the project and are one or two bedroom units that have been built in remote locations. They can grow organically in number as the overall project demands. Each of these aspire to distill the magic of the natural beauty of this remote pocket of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

<http://thegatheringburlington.com/>

3) Eden Mills Writers Festival

The Eden Mills Writers' Festival has been holding a literary picnic on the idyllic banks of Ontario's Eramosa River since 1989. The Festival was founded by former Eden Mills resident and Governor General Award-winning author, Leon Rooke. At the time, Leon and his wife Connie lived in the former stagecoach hotel across the street from the then Eden Mills General Store. The store owners, Don and Mark Holman, suggested that Leon launch his new novel, *A Good Baby*, from the front steps of their store. Leon invited other writers, including Rohinton Mistry, Michael Ondaatje, Jane Urquhart, and Linda Spalding to join him, and the Eden Mills Writers' Festival was born.

Over the years, the festival has hosted a veritable who's who of established and emerging Canadian writers, attracting the winners of Canada's major literary prizes, along with rising literary stars and well-established favourites such as Margaret Atwood, Alistair MacLeod, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and Lawrence Hill.

The Eden Mills Writers' Festival is a community-driven event. On Festival Sunday, the village, located northeast of Guelph, is closed to traffic. Residents make their properties available as reading sites, their lovely gardens providing a perfect story-book setting for the Festival. Other volunteers generously donate their time to set up and oversee reading sites, staff the gates and information booth, hand out free drinking water and more. Their welcoming spirit makes the Festival a uniquely warm and friendly experience for patrons and authors alike.

<http://edenmillswritersfestival.ca/#>

4) Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts

In 1983, the year of its forming, this all-Canadian writers festival was the only one of its kind. No other literary festival in the country followed a mandate to present and promote Canadian writers exclusively. Now, 35 years later, there are dozens of Canadian and international writers festivals scattered throughout the country. The ongoing success of Sechelt, BC's Sunshine Coast Festival of the Written Arts can be attributed to broad community support and the dedication of its audience, with many members returning to the Festival year after year.

Festival visitors spend nearly half a million dollars annually — a huge impact in a small town like Sechelt, concentrated over a three-day span. It's not unusual for Festival attendees to be so impressed, they end up buying property and settling down in the region — a difficult to quantify but nonetheless significant added economic and social benefit the town and region derive from this yearly event.

The local community pitches in every year, including 150 volunteers, and local businesses that sponsor and otherwise support the festival. Audiences are equally passionate and loyal — the Festival regularly attracts upwards of 9,000 attendees.

Literature, Canadian-style, and its celebration every summer at the Festival is but a single expression of one the Sunshine Coast's premier assets — its exceptionally strong cultural base — which is rigorously promoted to excellent effect.

<http://writersfestival.ca/>

5) Blyth Festival

The Blyth Centre for the Arts, including the Blyth Festival, was founded in 1975 to produce professional repertory theatre that reflects the culture and concerns of the people of southwestern Ontario and beyond.

In 1975, few scripts that fit the Festival's mandate were being written so early organizers jumped into the creation of new work. At that time, the Festival was the only summer theatre producing original Canadian plays, and one of the very few, if not the only "500-seat" theatre in Canada producing Canadian plays exclusively.

Today, located in a village of 1,000 in rural Huron County, the Blyth Centre for the Arts is a year-round centre of cultural activity for southwestern Ontario. In addition to the Blyth Festival, the Centre includes an art gallery that showcases three professional exhibits, one non-juried community show and coordinates a student exhibit each season. Choristers participate in the professionally-led Blyth Festival Singers, and musicians from three counties form the Blyth Festival Orchestra.

In addition, the Festival acts as a resource for local groups and makes its facilities available for community use. The Centre plays a major role in the business life of the village and the tourism industry in Huron County.

<http://www.blythfestival.com/>

6) Oregon Shakespeare Festival

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival traces its roots back to the Chautauqua movement, which brought culture and entertainment to rural areas in the late 19th century. Ashland, a small town in southeastern Oregon, saw its first Chautauquau building erected in 1893. Families travelled from all over southern Oregon and northern California to see performers such as John Phillip Sousa and William Jennings Bryan during the Ashland Chautauqua's 10-day seasons.

In 1917 a new, domed structure was erected in place of the original structure. This building eventually fell into disuse after the Chautauqua movement died out in the early 1920s. Its cement walls remain standing, surrounding the Allen Elizabethan Theatre, constructed in 2013.

Today the Festival produces eleven plays on three stages during a season that lasts from mid-February to early November. The Festival welcomed its millionth visitor in 1971, its 10-millionth in 2001, and its 20-millionth visitor in 2015. With its annual \$32 million budget, it has a substantial direct economic impact on Ashland and the surrounding region. The Festival serves as a visitor magnet, and has attracted many new residents to Ashland (pop. 20,000), drawn by access to world-class theatre, an excellent small university, and the vineyards and other amenities the town boasts.

<https://www.osfashland.org/>

7) Kaslo Jazz Etc. Festival

This intimate and laid-back world-class music festival has been hosting big names and newly discovered gems of the music business since 1992.

The Festival is located in the remote, small (pop. 1,000) village of Kaslo on the shores of fjord-like Kootenay Lake. Making full use of the astounding acoustics of Kaslo Bay Park to showcase an array of blues, jazz, Latin, folk, and world music artists, the Festival has been named as one of the “top ten places to get outdoors and be in tune,” by *USA Today*, and one of the “top 10 places in the world to enjoy outdoor summer music” by Reuters.

In 2016, guided by a new executive director, the Festival attracted over 7,000 people, a sellout that was repeated again in 2017, making the first long weekend in August the year’s best three-day period for local and regional businesses. The Festival actively engages and collaborates with other area non-profits, strongly supports local merchants and service providers as well as local and area musicians, and is looking to expand its footprint into new activities, marking it as one of the most significant economic engines in the North Kootenay Lake area.

<https://kaslojazzfest.com/>

8) Red Ants Pants Music Festival

The Red Ants Pants Music Festival, held in a cow pasture outside the small Montana ranching town of White Sulphur Springs (pop. 939), started in 2011, the brainchild of Red Ants Pants womenswear founder, Sarah Calhoun.

The Festival is an offshoot of the Red Ants Pants Foundation, a charitable organization dedicated to women’s leadership, working family farms and ranches, and rural communities. Proceeds from the Festival are used to fund the Foundation’s grant cycle and run timber skills and women’s leadership training courses. Festival operations are overseen by Calhoun and 90 staff, assisted by over 250 volunteers. Attendance in 2016 exceeded 16,000.

<http://redantspantsmusicfestival.com/>

9) Lanesboro Arts

Lanesboro (pop. 754) Minnesota's Lanesboro Arts organization began its journey in 1980 with the creation of the Lanesboro Art Council. The Council started Lanesboro's annual Art in the Park festival, and also assumed ownership of the St. Mane Theatre, bringing performances and films to this previously dormant space. As the Root River State Bike Trail opened and the town began to revitalize, the establishment of the Commonwealth Theatre Company in 1989 was aided by the Lanesboro Art Council, with the company performing in the St. Mane Theatre well into the 2000's.

In 1993, the Cornucopia Art Center opened in an old factory, providing artists with a gallery space to present their art and serve as a hub for the art community in Lanesboro and the surrounding area. By 1996, when Lanesboro was listed as one of "[The 100 Best Art Towns in America](#)," Cornucopia Art Center had moved into the organization's current building at 103 Parkway Avenue North and was bustling with activity. Over the years since its inception, Lanesboro Arts has become an important part of this small town's overall revitalization and economic development strategy.

<https://lanesboroarts.org/>

10) Rosebud Theatre & School of the Arts

In 1973, LaVerne Erickson, a music and art teacher in Calgary, started the Rosebud Camp of the Arts as a summer outreach program for Calgary youth who had rarely been outside of the city (Rosebud, Alberta, is a tiny hamlet of fewer than 200 people located 100 kilometres northeast of Calgary). Staffed by school teachers, artists and fine arts students, the Rosebud camping program drew campers from across Western Canada. The summer programs soon expanded into weekend vacations throughout the school year. Restoration of historic buildings was begun, and in 1977 the Rosebud Fine Arts High School was formed, with five students attending. The school combined academics, arts, and work experience with individualized attention to every student.

In 1986, the Rosebud School of the Arts launched its post-secondary apprenticeship program focused on theatre, music, and creative arts training. In 1988, the Alberta Legislature passed the Rosebud School of the Arts Act, creating a unique Christian arts guild school designed to assist other Canadian communities..

In 2001-02, over 90 students from Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, the United States, and Switzerland participated in the various secondary and post-secondary programs offered by Rosebud School of the Arts.

Rosebud Theatre stages seven plays a year – five at the town's Opera House and two at the BMO Studio Stage, offering matinee and evening shows up to seven times a week. In addition, other performers and their acts are brought in through the year to put on plays, concerts, and

presentations as part of its Rosebud Presents series. It is expected that over 40,000 people from across Canada and around the world will attend performances and events in 2017.

Rosebud School of the Arts is an expanding operation with plans for growth and development, but is keeping in mind at the same time that one of its major assets is its small community and rural setting. It is not an overstatement to say Rosebud and the Rosebud Theatre and School of the Arts are one and the same.

<https://www.rosebudtheatre.com/>

Conclusion

Clearly, festivals, local and regional arts organizations, and place-based culture generally make a substantial contribution to the social — and economic — fabric of rural communities. However, outside of a few scattered and often somewhat dated analyses, there has been little empirical evidence collected to back this observation up with numbers. To take a step toward addressing this, the BC Rural Centre is reaching out to each of the organizations featured in this paper in an attempt to gather comparable numbers that may well further augment “the case for rural culture.”

While there are literally thousands of examples of culture playing a role in the life quality of small towns and rural regions across BC, Canada, and the U.S., the ten examples selected here give a good sense of the types and breadth of arts-centric activities that are helping their respective communities flourish. We will publish the results of our inquiry as soon as sufficient data is collected and analyzed.

In the meantime, for communities looking for new paths toward revitalization, these examples may serve as both inspiration and stimulus.

For more information on the role of the arts and festivals in stimulating revitalization and economic development in rural communities, please visit our website, at <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/focus/population-attraction/>.

If you have questions, comments, or would like to receive the BC Rural Centre newsletter, send us an email or call us — we’d be happy to hear from you.

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Appendix

Arts and Economy (Newfoundland & Labrador Heritage): <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/arts/arts-economy.php>

Creating Change Through Arts, Culture, and Equitable Economic Development (a PolicyLink publication): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Creating-Change-through-Arts-Culture-and-Equitable-Development-A-Policy-and-Practice-Primer-.pdf>

Culture & rural development: how culture revitalized New York Mills, Minnesota (a BC Rural Centre case study): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/?s=new+york+mills>

Culture as an economic engine (Creative Cities of Canada Network): [https://www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/culture_economic_engine\(2\).pdf](https://www.creativecity.ca/database/files/library/culture_economic_engine(2).pdf)

Economic Impact Statement of the East Coast Music Association (2009): https://www.saskmusic.org/uploads/document/ecma_economicimpact_2009.pdf?t=1369772497

Folk Fest brings millions into Calgary's economy, according to report (CBC News Calgary post): <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-folk-fest-revenue-tourism-1.4225370>

Kaslo Jazz Festival (video interview with Executive Director Paul Hinrichs): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGJvOpB5y5Y>

Kaslo Jazz Festival Executive Director on rural music, money, and all that jazz! (a BC Rural Centre video from the 2017 Keeping It Rural conference): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/current-projects/keeping-rural-conference/keeping-it-rural-2017/kaslo-jazz-paul-hinrichs/>

Lanesboro Arts Executive Director John Davis on culture as a significant rural economic driver (a BC Rural Centre video from the 2017 Keeping It Rural conference): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/current-projects/keeping-rural-conference/keeping-it-rural-2017/2412-2/>

Lanesboro Arts Executive Director John Davis on culture as a rural social & economic catalyst (a BC Rural Centre video from the 2017 Keeping It Rural Conference): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/current-projects/keeping-rural-conference/keeping-it-rural-2017/lanesboro-arts-john-davis/>

Paul Muir, Education Director, Rosebud School of the Arts, on the arts & small communities (a BC Rural Centre podcast): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/2017/04/07/paul-muir-arts-small-rural-communities/>

Red Ants Pants Music Festival founder Sarah Calhoun on culture, community, and entrepreneurialism (a BC Rural Centre video from the 2017 Keeping It Rural conference): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/current-projects/keeping-rural-conference/keeping-it-rural-2017/red-ants-pants-sarah-calhoun/>

Rosebud Theatre Artistic Director Morris Ertman on how theatre transformed a tiny town into a cultural mecca (a BC Rural Centre video from the 2017 Keeping It Rural conference): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/current-projects/keeping-rural-conference/keeping-it-rural-2017/rosaebud-theatre-morris-ertman/>

Rural revitalization and the arts — a conversation with Lanesboro Arts Executive Director John Davis (a BC Rural Centre podcast): <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/2017/02/26/rural-arts-conversation-john-davis/>

Subsidising Stan: Measuring the social benefits of cultural spending (an analysis by Jeff Dayton-Johnson, Dalhousie University Department of Economics, and Emily King, Strategic research & Analysis, Department of Canadian Heritage): <https://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/faculty/science/economics/RePEc/dal/wparch/wpstan.pdf>

Williamsport, Pennsylvania uses “Heart & Soul” to revitalize itself: <http://heartofwilliamsport.org/>