

Future of HMF Concert Series being assessed after poor turnout



By Paula Brown

The Rotary Club of Shelburne says they'll be reevaluating plans for future Heritage Music Festival (HMF) events following disappointing attendance at HMF Concert Series.

The Shelburne Rotary Club closed out the last show of their summer HMF Concert Series earlier this month. But what was supposed to be their largest fundraiser of the year has come with a disappointing outcome as community attendance dwindled.

It's just so disheartening to do something for your community and then the attendance is poor, said Bobbi Ferguson, co-president of Shelburne Rotary.

The 2022 HMF Concert Series kicked off in late June with the ultimate classic rock experience from Leisa Way and her show Rock n' Roll Is Here To Stay. The concert shows continued in August with Alberta's country sensation Dan Davidson performing at the CDRC and Bands, Brews and BBQ featuring performances from the first, second and third place winners of the inaugural Dufferin Rising Star Competition.

The two final summer concerts were held on the weekend that the Heritage Music Festival has been historically known to take place, known as Fiddle Weekend.

For the Rotary Club of Shelburne, the Heritage Music Festival is their largest fundraiser with the revenue made during the event going directly back into local initiatives.

Each year the Rotary Club of Shelburne looks to raise between \$30,000 and \$40,000 to support the initiatives they help fund.

Ferguson said that while they're still waiting for official fundraising numbers to come in, they do know that they missed their donation goal significantly.

?It's disappointing because it hampers what we can give out to people. Our only revenue generator is our fundraisers and obviously if you don't make money, you have no money to spend. We're not down and out, but we estimate what we're going to make and when it's not that then you have to think about who do we cut, who do we not give money to this year.?

The Heritage Music Festival, along with its earlier variations, has been a long-standing annual tradition in the Town of Shelburne.

The first fiddle contest took place in August of 1951, and grew steadily over the years to include more classes in the competition, a beauty contest, and the Fiddle Parade. The event became known as Fiddleville.

While the number of contestants in the Fiddle Contest increase the audience for the contest continued to decline over the years and in 2016, Fiddleville was rebranded to the Heritage Music Festival and the Canadian Open Olde Time Fiddle Championship.

Prior to the pandemic, the Rotary Club and the Heritage Music Festival (HMF) were in transition mode; taking the event from a fiddle-centric week to a music festival that would appeal to a wider range of music lovers.

Ferguson said the disappointing turnout of attendees has left the Rotary Club with the need to have serious discussions before they begin the months of planning for next years including if the long-standing festival should be laid to rest.

?These events are put on for the entertainment of the residents of Shelburne to raise money for the people of Shelburne to support causes; your organizations; your schools; your sports teams; the arts and more,? said Ferguson. ?Families, singles, seniors, and children all benefit from the funds raised by these fundraising events and the lack of attendance puts the events future and support for the organizations they support in jeopardy.?