

Aging gracefully

Seniors' arts festival expands its reach

Joelle Reinger
Examiner Staff

Edmonton's three-year-old Creative Age Festival is already having a ripple effect on arts programming for seniors.

"Seniors' centres are getting more involved in bringing in creative activities," says Sheila Hallett, executive director of the Edmonton Seniors' Coordinating Council. "I would really like to see baby boomers and seniors of all ages not just being showcased one time a year but all year."

The festival, which runs June 8 to 16, started as an experiment in raising awareness of the health benefits of creative activity among retirees. About 1,000 people attended, followed by about 1,500 the next year.

This year's Creative Age Festival has the capacity for

3,000 to 5,000 participants and is broadening its reach beyond its downtown and university-area venues.

Festival co-ordinator Cathy Harvey says a number of festival events are designed to serve seniors where they're already meeting.

The Northgate Lions Seniors' Centre, Westend Seniors' Activity Centre and Strathcona Place Seniors' Centre are among the festival venues.

"The purpose of that is to reach more seniors in the community," Harvey says.

The festival aims to increase the number of seniors pursuing visual and performing arts, regardless of past experience.

"It's not just a festival for its own sake; it's a festival that has great implications year round," Harvey adds.

The Festival of Edmonton Seniors' Theatre (FEST), which is part of the Creative Age Festival, also hosts fall and winter workshops.

FEST co-ordinator Dhana

NORTHGATE



Two members of the Richard Tan Dancers perform during last year's Creative Age Festival kickoff.

PHOTO SUPPLIED

Cartmell says last year's theatre festival drew more participants than expected and some were acting for the first time.

"I've heard people say, 'This has become my lifeline. I've become a whole different person,'" she says.

This year's FEST features drama workshops on

Shakespeare, clowning, musical theatre and performing comedy, as well as a multi-generational storytelling event and theatre production written and performed by seniors.

Cartmell says FEST aims to shine a spotlight on seniors' issues.

"I do think a lot of seniors

feel like they're not being heard or not being seen," she says. "There's still so much that they can offer in terms of their wisdom and creativity."

A full festival schedule is available online at creativeagefestival.ca.

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