Festival celebrates aging creatively

By Jamie Hall, Edmonton Journal
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Festivals aren't intended to be life-changing events, but a testimonial about the one that will kick off at Edmonton City Hall on Tuesday suggests otherwise.

"I spoke to a woman who was well into her 60s and she discovered, much to her surprise, that she was a good writer after she went to one of the writing workshops last year," says Cathy Harvey. "She said to me: 'It completely changed my life.' "

Harvey is the co-ordinator of the Creative Age Festival, which gets its name from research that suggests "creative aging" -- becoming engaged in music, painting, drama, storytelling or writing -- improves the mental and physical health of seniors and by extension helps them live longer, happier lives.

This is the third year for the festival, which, much like the city's aging population, has been growing every year. This year's program includes a closing celebration featuring Rolanda Lee and her Gentlemen of Jazz, bestselling author Mary Woodbury, and performances by the Geriactors drama troupe and the School Boys Big Band.

The festival runs in conjunction with Seniors' Week in the province, gets underway Tuesday and runs to June 16. Some of Edmonton's finest 55-plus performers will perform at City Hall on Tuesday from 10 a.m. to noon. Sixteen events will be held at a dozen venues throughout the city during the festival, with more than 150 seniors performing or presenting.

"There's no shortage of talent in this city, that's for sure," says Harvey.

There will be an art workshop and seniors' art exhibit at the Art Gallery of Alberta, film screenings, storytelling, drama workshops and a choral fest. There's also an educational facet to the festival, with this year's theme focusing on aboriginals, and their connections to healing and the arts.

Most of the events are free. For more information, go to creativeagefestival.ca

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