

## Milner's eye on the arts

ASSISTANT DEPUTY MINISTER SAYS PROVINCE CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ARTISTS

by Vivian Moreau

As a mother who has taken her artistic children to Vancouver because there weren't enough creative opportunities available in Whistler schools, Jane Milner has one perspective on arts and culture.

As the former president and CEO of North Shore Credit Union she has another.

But now as the assistant deputy minister of sports, arts, and culture she draws on both aspects to inform the position she's held for six months.

Speaking to a group of local businesswomen at the Hilton Whistler Resort on Monday evening, Milner said she doesn't take it personally that there wasn't a lot of money for the arts in the recent provincial budget. Instead she supports the ministry's strategic approach to creating a framework that will establish policy and strategies through research projects such as that which recently surveyed individual B.C. artists on their needs and concerns.

Milner said by gathering information from independent artists about what levels

of education they have, how much they earn and what their needs are for, marketing their work it's clear that plans for encouraging arts and culture need to create opportunities to perform rather than simply hand out grants.

But she also acknowledged to the Women of Whistler group that in Whistler promoting the arts has been difficult in the past. A 12-year Whistler resident and parent of five children, including recording artist Ali Milner, she recalled how the Whistler Centre for Business and the Arts failed in the 1990s because "Whistler just wasn't ready for it."

"Lobbying in 1995 for the arts was like banging our head against the wall," Milner said, recalling how a concert for Diana Krall held in the original conference centre atrium had difficulty selling 200 tickets.

Although Milner noted that \$9.5 million in annual B.C. grants return almost \$300 million in economic spending in the province, she doesn't feel grants to individual artists are the best strategy for encouraging the arts. The survey of 70-100 artists found that although 40 per cent of those who responded were better educated than the average worker in B.C., many were

living on or below the poverty line. She stressed that artists need more opportunities to showcase their talents and that should be the focus of arts funding.

But Milner also stressed there is too much of an expectation in Whistler that artists play for free. Quoting author

three exhibit cars, two passenger cars and one entertainment car will rotate through the province. While stopped in communities artists will have the opportunity to perform and could be featured at local receptions.

As to getting involved in 2010 it should

**"Lobbying in 1995 for the arts was like banging our head against the wall."**

-JANE MILNER

Margaret Atwood who recently advocated "just pay the piano player," Milner said it should be recognized that live concerts at the bottom of the gondolas are just as much art as a classical concerto performed in Millennium Place. And she stressed the importance of creating opportunities for artists to perform.

"This should not be that hard," she said.

In recognition of B.C.'s 150th anniversary of its inception as a British colony next year, Milner outlined a travelling spirit train that will travel to 50 communities in the province. Led by the vintage steam locomotive Royal Hudson,

mean more than getting caught up in building facilities, corraling media or remembering which athletes grabbed the medals, Milner said, adding that Whistler needs to not miss out on developing a cultural identity and should look to determining what its image should be.

Afterward, Whistler Arts Council Executive Director Doti Niedermayer acknowledged the steps the province is taking to learn from individual artists but also said it is also time to get a move on.

"It is 2007 already and we do need time to build our legacy... but we can't be doing this (still planning) in 2009," she said. ■