

Top arts stories of the year

Squamish Valley Music Fest has surprises for 2016

[Rebecca Aldous](#) / Squamish Chief

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The Squamish Valley Music Festival attracted record crowds in 2015, and 40,000 a day are expected in 2016. Photo: File

Squamish Valley Music Fest has surprises for 2016

It was bigger and better than ever before, according to officials.

The 2015 Squamish Valley Music Festival's scanners beeped green 116,579 times over four days worth of music while \$15 million poured into Squamish's economy, according to producers.

But the best is yet to come, SVMF's executive producer Paul Runnals told The Squamish Chief. Over the past six years, the festival has firmly established itself as the premier contemporary music festival in western Canada and one of the top mid-sized festivals in North America, he said.

"We intend to build on this with even more creative programming and a host of other enhancements to the customer experience."

Attendance at the 2016 SVMF is anticipated to increase to 40,000 people a day.

"With our expected capacity increase to 40,000 per day, we are confident that we will exceed 140,000 total attendees in 2016," Runnals said.

Runnals is keeping mum on what's in store for 2016. Festival organizers anticipate launching the lineup early in the new year. He told The Squamish Chief he's got some big secrets that he can't wait to share.

"There are a few surprises that we are currently nurturing, and certainly we've been approached about a few new initiatives," Runnals said. "We are currently exploring these and will share details as we are able."

The 2015 event brought some big names to the main stage as more than 70 artists from around the world gathered in Squamish. Canadian rapper Drake held the crowds' attention, then a British invasion followed: singer/songwriter Sam Smith and the band Mumford & Sons.

The event helps place Squamish on the map, Mayor Patricia Heintzman said. The music festival, along with a slew of other events this past summer, made Squamish one of the most-spoken-about municipalities in the media, she said.

Brackendale Art Gallery goes up for sale

Brackendale's entertainment hub could soon change hands.

In June, the builders and founders of the Brackendale Art Gallery hung a "for sale" sign on its door. Thor Froslev pieced the iconic property together in the early '70s. But due to Thor's health, he and his wife, Dorte, made the tough decision to sell the property, which includes a gallery store, dining room and theatre, art and yoga studio, eagle conservatory and chapel.

The price tag on the lot sits at \$2.7 million. In June, the couple told The Squamish Chief that they want to find "the right buyer" and consider the community's wants. They hope to find someone who would take it over or use the centre in some other way to benefit the community, such as a facility that offers personal, spiritual and artistic development programs.

That's still the case, Dorte said.

"My big hope is the community will step up and the [District of Squamish] takes it on," she said, adding there are many options that vary between public and private partnerships.

"I think it would be a wonderful arts and nature centre to go with the park," she added, referring to the Brackendale Farmers' Institute Park.



Boeing Boeing marked a milestone for Between Shifts Theatre in 2015. - File

Curtains rise on 50th Between Shifts play

Between Shifts Theatre hit a milestone in 2015. The non-profit theatre society lifted the curtains on the company's 50th production since its start in 1993. *Boeing Boeing* took to the stage at the Eagle Eye Theatre in April. The play, which follows the exploits of an architect living in Paris while juggling three fiancées, marked the company's success.

"I was really glad I was in the 50th production," said Kathryn Daniels, who helped found Between Shifts Theatre 23 years ago. "It meant so much to me."

In December, Between Shifts staged another successful production, *The Patron Saint of Stanley Park*.

Between Shifts' goal is to bring Squamish and the Sea to Sky Corridor top-quality theatre, Daniels said. Daniels won several Theatre BC Mainstage awards the year before.

While *Boeing Boeing* was a milestone and both plays this year were well received, Daniels said she had hoped the society would be further ahead of its current position at this marker. "I really wanted Between Shifts Theatre to have its own theatre, studio and box office," Daniels said.

With the push from the Squamish Arts Council to build a community arts hub now on a roll, Daniels hopes her dream will become a reality in 2016.

Biennale waves goodbye

Over the past two years, Vancouver Biennale has brought root sculptures, a giant wolf and blue trees to Squamish.

And while those major pieces hit the spotlight, the outdoor public art show's project manager, Ammar Mahimwalla, said his highlight was the artists in residency program at Quest University.

Mexican and American artist Miguel Horn and Chris Landau collaborated on a piece, while Syrian artist Tammam Azzam, Bahrainian artist Hasan Hujairi, Indian artist Shweta Bhattad and Australian artist Kristin McIver created work that popped up all over town. McIver's work, "This Beautiful Day," can be seen in Squamish's new park beside the Mamquam Blind Channel. A Squamish Nation blessing that starts off with the same words inspired her 26-foot, solar power neon sign.

"Each one of the projects was very unique," Mahimwalla said.

Australian artist Konstantin Dimopoulos was in Squamish to paint trees at a downtown park and at Coast Mountain Academy blue. The artwork aims to raise environmental consciousness.

The work followed art pieces by Brazilian artist Hugo Franca and fellow countryman Vik Muniz that were completed in 2014. This year, Franca's giant wood sculptures were placed in different locations around the community, including in the children's play area at Smoke Bluffs Park. "That has been really exciting," he said. "At this point, our focus is really on creating legacy."

Writers' conference begins

Squamish's inaugural writers' conference exceeded its founder's expectations.

In June, the Quest University's writer's conference kicked off with the Welh Tima Kexwusem dancers. They stood for what the event was all about – unity and honour of place and history. Elders and the next generation stood side by side as approximately 100 guests attended the opening ceremonies.

It was a "soulful" moment for the founder and director of the conference, Jessamyn Smyth. The writer's conference featured seven international, award-winning authors, poets and instructors, while its opening reflected National Aboriginal Day. Among the big names that week was Mvskoke Creek Nation poet Joy Harjo and authors Rebecca Brown and Oliver de la Paz.

The conference was absolutely magical, Smyth said, noting 2016 is shaping up to be no different. "It was everything I had hoped for and some," she said.

The 2016 conference will run from June 12 to 19.



The 24-Drum was a resounding success. - File

24-Hour Drum on a roll

It was an 8-month-long process that was neatly tied together with an exhilarating 24-hour drum.

In May, hundreds of students from across the Sea to Sky Corridor met at Howe Sound Secondary School to take part in an event organized by the Aboriginal Youth Leadership group.

During the school year, 60 students throughout the school district took part in a project that touched on racism and using their voice in a way that would propel them forward, said principal for aboriginal education Susan Leslie. It was a long inquiry, which also touched on reconciliation and looked into the student-selected subject of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

“It has been a long journey,” Leslie said, noting students ended up with a presentation they shared with the community and other schools.

The wrap up event was the gathering at Howe Sound. It touched on heavy subjects like racism, but also fielded some laughs. A video, titled *How White are You?* by Howe Sound students depicted what it would be like if white people were asked the same kinds of stereotypical questions that youth of First Nations descent face.

This coming year’s event is going to be bigger and better, Leslie said, noting this school year, it will be held at Whistler Secondary School.



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