

# St. Albert Gazette

## Mayor's gala and StArts Fest part ways

Gala to take one year hiatus, returning in March 2013

By: Anna Borowiecki

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**NO AWARDS** - The mayor's arts gala, which awards local artists for their achievements, is splitting from the annual StArts Fest and won't run in 2012. The gala will resurface in March 2013.

There will be no 2012 version of the Mayor's Celebration of the Arts Gala, as the event has been officially split from the fall StArts Fest event.

The two combined events were the city's answer to celebrating the three-day Alberta Arts Days, normally held in September. But ongoing discussions earlier this year led to the decision that the two events were no longer a fit for each other.

As a result, there will be no 2012 mayor's gala. It will resurface as a separate entity in March 2013 while StArts Fest will run in conjunction with the province's rebranded Alberta Culture Days Sept. 28 through 30.

"The timing for the mayor's gala was off in September in terms of getting the community involved," explained Nancy Watt, committee co-chair and gala organizer.

"Nominations were difficult to get in the late spring and they were juried in the summer. We also wanted to give the gala a standalone place to have a prominence of its own," she said.

The plush red-carpeted mayor's gala lauds worthy local artists and arts supporters for their achievements while the two-day StArts Fest is a free day of activities, workshops and special events.

Members of the gala committee — including Watt, Sandy Kordyback, Heather Dolman, Nancy Abrahamson, Tamsin Brooks and Adam Mitchell — approached Mayor Nolan Crouse about the proposed change.

"He was very much in favour of another festival," Watt explained.

And as for StArts Fest, streamlining and improving the nomination process has always been a leading goal, said organizer Peter Moloney.

"Maybe we jumped the gun a little bit, but in the end it was the right decision," he said.

Last year the mayor's gala attracted about 180 guests and cost about \$25,000 for marketing, a nominee reception, performing artist fees and awards. StArts Fest attracted about 800 people and the cost of the weekend activities added up to about \$6,500.

In an email, Moloney mentioned that the main revenue streams were a city council grant, an Art Days provincial grant, gala ticket sales and art award sponsorships from city businesses. As well, there were in-kind donations from the city's cultural services department, the Alberta Heritage Foundation, the St. Albert Public Library and small corporate donations.

Although the festival and the gala are now separate events, they will continue to be managed under the St. Albert cultivates the arts committee. To keep these two events financially afloat in future years, the committee is forming St. Albert Cultivates the Arts Society, a registered non-profit organization with a funding mandate.

"We aim to keep the gala fiscally responsible and through sponsorship we're planning on running at a zero-based budget," Watt added.

Any member of the public interested in being part of the new society can email inquiries to [info@startsfest.ca](mailto:info@startsfest.ca).

"We have a few new ideas," Watt said. "We want to give the gala a fresh face and we're going into our fourth year. I can see it going bigger and better."

Replacing the mayor's gala at StArts Fest is the Arden Theatre's season opener. Stay tuned for announcements in late spring or early summer.

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