

# Creative Expressions

Inspiring vibrant and positive aging ∞ Promoting participatory arts ∞ Engaging civic stakeholders

The Official Newsletter of the Creative Aging Calgary Society

## Inside this issue:

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <i>2012 Creative Aging Calgary Symposium review &amp; reflections</i> | 1<br>—<br>3 |
| <i>CACS Annual General Meeting</i>                                    | 3           |
| <i>Eden Associate Certificate Training</i>                            | 3           |
| <i>Jubilee Event—FREE</i>   | 3           |

## Art for Seniors Promotes Healing

Originally published on Tuesday, 01 May 2012 in the Calgary Journal ([www.calgaryjournal.ca/index.php/calgary-arts/947-art-for-seniors-and-residents-of-long-term-care-facilities-promotes-healing](http://www.calgaryjournal.ca/index.php/calgary-arts/947-art-for-seniors-and-residents-of-long-term-care-facilities-promotes-healing)). Re-published with permission by the author. WRITTEN BY MELISSA MOLLOY

Many studies have linked participation in some type of artistic work with positive outcomes for people living with dementia. A 2010 article in the Journal of Active Aging said that "artistic endeavors target the healthy parts of the brain - areas untouched by disease, whether the participant has Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia." Other benefits listed in the article include reduction of anxiety and depression, increased concentration, greater social interaction and improved attention spans.

The Creative Aging Calgary Society, a non-profit organization established in 2008, recently organized its 3rd symposium to help educate the public and health care professionals about the ways in which various art forms appear to have a positive "physical impact ... on older adults." In addition to two keynote speakers, multiple workshops were organized in which health care professionals and seniors experience how different creative expressions could promote

various levels of healing not only for patients with dementia, but all forms of age-related stress or disease.

### ART AS A HEALING TOOL

On the projector screen at the Ross Glen conference hall, a drawing stares back at the crowd of roughly 100 people, evoking a collective gasp that rises and falls into the high-ceilinged room.

On one side of the drawing a long procession of people in wheelchairs disappear into the front gates of a factory, while the back door ushers out rows and rows of coffins. The drawing is titled "Long Term Care" and the artist is a resident of such a facility. Jeff Nachtigall, the artist-in-residence from Sherbrooke Community Centre - a long term care facility in Saskatoon - points out the piles of people crowding into the artist's depiction of hell at the bottom of his drawing, while above the factory a handful of souls float whimsically up into the heavens.

It is only one of many drawings that Nachtigall, one of the keynote speakers for

the third Creative Aging Calgary Symposium, has brought to demonstrate the powerful results of using visual arts as a way for residents of long-term care facilities to access their own creative potential.

"I look at art as being a communal language," Nachtigall tells the crowd. "I'm not a teacher - (the studio at the long-term care facility) is an environment where peers come together and we share as artists."

In a later workshop, Nachtigall tells a smaller crowd about his recent work with a group of veterans. He says that the first hurdle was dealing with the notion the vets had that art was something "the wives did."

The artist says that many of his sessions fell flat, and the participants seemed less than eager to express their creative selves. The lackluster reception was further exaggerated by the fact that many of the participants were also living with Alzheimer's or dementia, illnesses causing short attention spans at the best of times. *Cont. on p. 2*



Jeff Nachtigall's workshop included a participatory painting session that included the use of wheelchairs, crutches, and bare feet. Photo by M. Molloy

## SPECIAL INTEREST

- Creative Aging Calgary Society AGM ~ September 12, 2012
- Submissions to our newsletter are welcome! See page 4 for details.
- Watch for our next issue in September 2012!

## *Art for Seniors Promotes Healing ... continued from p. 1*

But when Nachtigall got the idea to place a large canvas on the floor of the studio and attach rags to the bottoms of canes and wheelchairs "the session lasted for over an hour", and the veterans were not only fully engaged, but reluctant to stop painting. This was only one revelation in which Nachtigall realized that "you don't have to paint with a brush. I believe that we are born artists. Before we can write, before we can read, we can communicate visually." Nachtigall says. "What happens to our creativity when we get older? Do we lose it? Maybe we haven't lost (it), but we have buried it. Some of us have buried it deeper than others." Nachtigall stresses that the whole notion of visual art has to be "demystified." He believes that everyone has the potential to create something great, but many times ideas about "good" art and "bad" art have to be reframed.

He assures the crowd that with the willingness to think outside the box, art can be a way of restoring passion and joy into the lives of not only older adults, but anybody. He backs up this claim with photographs of fully paralyzed people creating elaborate paintings. "I'm not interested in limitations."

### **CONDUCTORCIZE®: HEALING THROUGH MOVEMENT AND MUSIC**

Maestro David Dworkin is a Juilliard graduate with over 60 years of experience conducting orchestras across North America and overseas. At 77, Dworkin now travels extensively and educates health care professionals on how to use his music-based exercise program, Conductorcize® – a fitness program that benefits older adults through physical movement and the development of deeper listening skills. A group of 30 or so symposium attendees are given a single chopstick while an exuberant Dworkin explains the healing properties of music. He tells the crowd of his experience at a long term care facility in Washington D.C. where he demonstrated his program to a group of vets, some of whom had suffered extreme maiming. "One man came in a wheelchair covered in towels, even wrapped around his face," Dworkin describes. "God only knows what happened to him." When the maestro turned on a march, however, the same man in the wheelchair began to move his cane rhythmically up and down to the astonishment of the facility's employees, who later told Dworkin that it had been the first movement the man had made in months. "Music is very powerful," Dworkin says.

Along with the movements of a conductor, participants in Dworkin's classes are also asked to listen deeply to layers of the music he plays - tuning the ear to hear the beat of the basses way down beneath the sing-song sound of the flutes and oboes. "When you learn new things, the brain is wiring and firing," Dworkin tells the crowd.

While Mozart fills the workshop room with complex sounds, the participants of Dworkin's seminar seem overcome with joy - feet tapping and arms flowing from side to side, mimicking the rhythm of a true conductor. One can almost visualize the symphony before them. After all, it is difficult not to fully engage with Dworkin, who is so clearly passionate about what he teaches. Jumping up and down, his eyes closed, he tells the class to let the music infiltrate their whole body.



Visual artist, Jeff Nachtigall and Maestro David Dworkin were the keynote speakers at the 3rd Creative Aging Symposium. Photo by M. Molloy

*The Creative Aging Calgary 2012 Symposium was supported in part by Calgary 2012, Culture Capital of Canada Grant Program.*

**CALGARY  
2012**



## **Symposium Workshop Reflections**

### *"I Remember it Well. . . ." A Guide to Encouraging Poetic Expression in Older Adults*

At the Creative Aging Symposium, Jennifer Williams, a recreation therapist at Sagewood Seniors Community in Strathmore, led a group of participants through a poetry workshop. Her theme for the session was "motherhood" and she read several poems on mothers to get us primed. We then brainstormed some thoughts about and qualities of mothers, and based on these ideas, we grouped the words and assembled lines until we had created a poem. Our next step was to have each participant write a poem independently. This time our focus was our own mother figure and we each developed a list of words based on our memories and views of our mother. The result was a variety of poems, from a one-liner to short narrative poems, to longer poems with lines that rhymed. It was a fun experience that stimulated our memories and creativity.

*Contributed by Dianne McDermid*

### **"Laughter Yoga"**

Fif Fernandes, BFA, a certified "Laughter Yoga Leader and Teacher", provided a energized session that took the 20 or so participants on educational journey through laughter as a form of yoga. In addition to learning about this novel approach, the participants were able to experience the benefits that laughter yoga can bestow upon a user. Fif's efforts were roundly appreciated. *Contributed by Ralph Hubele*

***“Live on the Up Beat – Let’s Drum!!”***

Ever wonder what a drum circle is? That was my very thought when I signed up for just one of the concurrent sessions offered through Creative Aging Calgary Symposium held in April, 2012. This session was facilitated by Jennifer Buchanan. “When I walked into the room and my first drum circle I felt weary and lost; when I walked out, I was on FIRE!” I was joined by 25 participants, men, women and skeptics galore! However the drum circle did its magic once again and smiles were on every face as we left the circle. “The drum circle really enhanced our day; I continually referred to the drum circle experience to “drum in the messages” with added benefits such as elevated mood and relieved stress. It was a “Great experience in which I would recommend anyone to participate”. Remember, no music experience required, no drumming experience required. Just enjoy what the experience brings to you though Mind, Body and Spirit. “Thank You” for a wonderful, moving and peaceful journey. *Contributed by Kathy Eyre*

***“Dance/Play—How dance can keep you fit and smart”***

Nadia Hochberger and two of her senior instructors led us through the energizing workshop “Dance/Play- How Dance Can Keep You Fit and Smart”. The participants were guided with music and free form movement to explore and become aware of the creative energy of the body. *Contributed by Beverly Falkeid*

***“The Voices Jewish Seniors Choir”***

Karina Szulc and The Voices Jewish Seniors Choir provided an opportunity to exercise participants’ vocal cords in a collaborative rendition of ‘Oh, Rock My Soul’. Karina weaves musical magic with The Voices choir and has a loyal group of singers that perform throughout Calgary. *Contributed by Beverly Falkeid*

***“Making Story Telling Creative”***

I had the pleasure of attending the Making Story Telling Creative session at the Creative Aging Calgary Symposium. I would like to commend Kim Coulter (BFA, AT, Resident Artist), Becky Kimber (BFA, Artist in Residence, Garrison Green Seniors Community), and Bev Tosh (BFA, MA, Artist). Kim and Becky took us through the process to create short stories with older adult groups using Bev’s artwork as a jumping of point for the story. The stories begin as an impression or feeling from what is going on in a certain piece of art and grow to have a life of their own. Whoever is leading the group better be a good scribe as ideas and suggestions start to flow pretty fast. This is a great program that can be done with anyone young or old. There is very little cost associated and will really go as far as your imagination can take you. *Contributed by Carrie Erikson.*

**Cooking Lessons**

*By Esther Harris*

My sister always loved to cook  
when we were growing up  
she baked cupcakes that rose from the pans  
light as angels only we called them fairy cakes  
not knowing any better

At tea time she handed them round,  
goddess-like as if she herself had just risen from the waves a Botticelli  
Venus, flaunting them and a goofy smirk  
courting a lifetime of sibling envy from me

I wish I didn’t have such a long memory  
and that I didn’t like devil’s food cake so much!

***Save the Date!***  
***CACS 2012 AGM***

The Creative Aging Calgary Society will hold its 2012 AGM on Wednesday **September 12, 2012** from 7:00 - 9:00 pm at the Garrison Green Seniors Community, 3028 Don Ethell Blvd SW.

Annual reports will be presented based on the 2011-2012 operating year. Directors will stand for election (*see Call for Directors at [www.creativeagingcalgary.ca](http://www.creativeagingcalgary.ca)*) or re-election.

A special presentation will follow the AGM. Membership renewal or sign-up also available at the AGM or online.

RSVP by September 1: [info@creativeagingcalgary.ca](mailto:info@creativeagingcalgary.ca).

**Spend the Afternoon  
at the Jube!**

The Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium presents a series of **free** day-time events.

**Lifelong Learning Series—will resume Fall 2012. Last event before summer will be:**

***Musical to Movie CSI with Bonnie Gratz***

**June 18, 2012 from 12:30-2:00pm**

It’s criminal! Those changes that are made to musicals when they are adapted into movies. Enjoy a fun sing-a-long afternoon with Freelance Director, Playwright and Actress Bonnie Gratz as we uncover and expose some of the most famous musical to movie crimes- ever!

Limited space is available; to book your spot, please contact:

**Anna Dunne at 403.297.2841 or [anna.dunne@gov.ab.ca](mailto:anna.dunne@gov.ab.ca)**

**Certified Eden Associate Training**

Certified Eden Associate Training is an exciting and challenging 3-day journey into the world of person-directed care, proven to offer practical tools, resources, and inspiration that empower individuals and teams to initiate and maintain effective change in long-term care. Cheryl George and Suellen Beatty, Regional Coordinators for Western Canada are presenting a Certified Associate’s Training Program at Prince of Peace Banquet Hall, 285030 Luther Rose Blvd. N.E., Calgary on Tuesday June 12 to Thursday June 14 (9:00 am– 5:00 pm with after hour activities). *More information and registration form @ [www.creativeagingcalgary.ca](http://www.creativeagingcalgary.ca).*

**Your classified here! See page 4 for information and pricing! Members save!**

## Creative Aging Calgary Society

### Executive

Gail Hinchliffe, President  
 Ralph Hubele, Vice-President  
 Steve Sabjan, Treasurer  
 Elaine Danelesko, Secretary

### Committee Chairs

Dianne McDermid, *Education and Programming*  
 Suzanne Brett Welsh, *Communications*  
 Sharon Moore  
 Eileen Fitzpatrick  
 Kathy Eyre  
 Janene Burwash  
 Carrie Erickson

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## Membership Info

Memberships are available at no charge online:  
[www.creativeagingcalgary.ca](http://www.creativeagingcalgary.ca).

Members receive event and information updates as well as quarterly newsletters.

## Creative Expressions

Creative Expressions is the official newsletter for the Creative Aging Calgary Society (CACS). It is published four times a year and distributed electronically ([www.creativeagingcalgary.ca](http://www.creativeagingcalgary.ca)). Questions regarding article / photo contributions should be directed to the editor at [editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca](mailto:editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca) or 403-836-5631. **Please note**, the information and opinions in this newsletter are subject to change, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the publisher, the editor, or the CACS Board of Directors. **Disclaimer:** Any advertisements, businesses, or other parties listed in Creative Expressions should not be interpreted as recommendations or endorsements by the CACS, the editor or the publisher. Re-publication of the Creative Expressions Newsletter (in whole or part) requires the expressed written permission of the article's author and the publisher. Please direct republication requests to [editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca](mailto:editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca)

## Strategic Priorities

### Advocacy

*Enhance awareness of participatory arts and aging programs with a variety of stakeholders*

### Practice

*Foster connections between older adults, artists, professionals and interested community members*

### Research

Clearly communicate cutting-edge research specific to arts participation

### Education

*Share information about local arts-based programs and opportunities for learning*

### Governance

*Generate an effective Board with membership that reflects our diverse community*

## Volunteer Here

The Creative Aging Calgary Society is relatively new group and is seeking volunteers to help with our various committees. Please contact: [info@creativeagingcalgary.ca](mailto:info@creativeagingcalgary.ca) for more information related to *Education & Programming, Communications, Membership, Sponsorship & Funding, Marketing & Promotion or Research*.

## Submissions Welcome

Articles, book reviews, event and special interest items related to Creative Aging are all welcome. Please contact the editor at [editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca](mailto:editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca) for more information. Next issue: September 2012. Submission deadline August 15, 2012.

## Your Business Ad Here

Business ads are welcome: \$20/issue for 40 words (first ad free for members). Graphic ads, 1/8 page size, also welcome for \$75 per issue (members receive 20% discount). Please contact the editor at [editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca](mailto:editor@creativeagingcalgary.ca). Next issue: September 2012. Submission deadline: August 15, 2012.