

Copy of Reports presented at the AGM, March 31, 2019

Board of Directors Report

Last year thirty or so people stayed on after the formal AGM was over to do some thinking together. We asked each other what drew us to the schoolhouse, which of MERA's many "doings" engaged us now, and where we might like to grow into the future. I've decided to frame this report of the Board of Director's activity over the intervening year as a response to that conversation.

Several themes became obvious as we talked. We described what drew us to MERA with words like community, belonging, and friendship. We said we wanted more opportunities to gather together. Looking at our present and into our future we said we wanted to make more effort to include children and young families in MERA events. Talk of gatherings led to questions about the kitchen and whether or not it needed work to bring it up to "code" if we planned to use it more heavily, and then to talk of money and how to raise it. Get-togethers and activities; incorporating kids; the kitchen and money: I'll address them one at a time.

It is a happy truth that much of the volunteer time and energy invested in MERA already counts as a chance to get together – even board meetings feel like a gathering of friends around a table. Add a feast of pizza from our outdoor oven to the task of spring cleaning and the work bee becomes a party! From arts and activity group organizers to "around-the-world-on-a-dinner-plate" cooks and chair-stackers after a Sunday afternoon concert MERA folk know that pitching in affirms their sense of belonging. There have been many community gatherings since that conversation: the highlights include the McDonald's Corners Farmer's Market, Fall Saturdays at La Senda Community Café, monthly community dinners (supported initially by a generous grant from the Perth and District Community Foundation), Halloween and Christmas parties, the wassail party, wonderful concerts, and, of course, an amazing variety of activity groups meeting regularly to weave, quilt, pot, dance, make music and create in an endless variety of ways. I want to gratefully acknowledge the huge efforts behind all of these activities. They are the heart and soul of this community. I want to thank Hilary Barrett and Ankaret Dean in particular for their long time work steering MERA's Programme Committee, and Helen Mogford, who has taken on the task of formalising the role of that committee to help Trina Conboy (our patient administrator) tame the amount of communication that goes into organizing events.

The PDCF sponsored dinners mentioned above were part of a deliberate effort to reach out to the young families in our neighbourhood. The dinners have become potluck events, built on intergenerational friendships developed over the past year. We have Jan Griffiths and Patti-Jo Wilson to thank for providing the coordination and momentum needed to keep these gatherings happening. The *Imagination Station* at the market through the summer (Sponsored by La Senda Community Café and managed by Jan) was created to deliberately make space for children and make it easier for their parents to enjoy a morning at the farmer's market. From the children's own perspective fixing up the troll house so they could safely play inside created the most inviting space of all. Thank you to Peter Cochrane and Barry Russell for that good work!

After some research and much discussion, the board agreed unanimously to put the question of upgrades to the kitchen to rest. The kitchen, as is, works well for our purposes. The dishwasher question was specifically closed. The cost of a machine that would serve as needed is prohibitive and, arguably, would rob us of a great community building opportunity. I'm sure everyone here has witnessed dish washing as a team sport following a MERA dinner! Our thanks to Glynnis who often heads up that team.

The governing board responded to the money question in several ways. To begin with, we significantly increased annual membership fees. I am grateful to report that there has been very little protest. You have generously accepted the extra cost as necessary, an inevitable response to rising expenses. Thank you. You will also have heard about the “What does MERA mean to you?” fundraising campaign launched last fall. The truth is, we cannot raise sufficient funds to pay all the bills without appealing to you directly for donations. Memberships, concert ticket sales and workshop fees simply do not add up to enough. A balanced budget for 2019 relies on actually receiving the projected \$7000 in donations. There is a perennial gap between what we can raise as income, and the actual costs of keeping MERA running. We are counting on you. You will find the Silver/Grey “Supporter” cards in the card rack in the kitchen.

As their own spectacular contribution to MERA as a whole, MERA’s “Needle Pushers” and “Heritage Weavers” have generously provided prizes for a fundraising raffle running now until the winning tickets are drawn at the Farmer’s Market on July 27th. The goal is to sell 600 tickets. It is a community-wide fund-raising effort that counts on your participation. The money we raise together will go toward new A/V equipment, enhancing our ability to stage concerts, and broadening the possible scope of future events, events that will give us ever more opportunities to gather together, building community and the friendships that support it. And so, I come full circle, back to our community built on friendships and participation. Thank you all!

Respectfully submitted by Lyndal Neelin
(Chair – MERA Board of Directors)

Programming Committee Report

Current Membership: Helen Mogford: Chair, Ankaret Dean, Lyndal Neelin, Lynne Shwadchuck, Judy Watts, PJ Wilson

Highlights from the Past Year

As usual, lots of good things happened at MERA last year.

In 2018 MERA received grant money from PDCF to put on regular community dinners to attract children and families. MERA hosted several seasonal parties aimed at children that were much enjoyed. The Wassail party celebrated another new year. The winter dinners took a new form, Around MERA on a Dinner Plate, which were particularly entertaining. Other events carried on smoothly, with many creative groups meeting in the schoolhouse.

Workshops and classes included fibre arts, stained glass, basketry, painting classes, recorders, dance groups, and others, including the unique Blanket Exercise event.

Our new summer camp director, Jan Griffiths, ran a very successful week in July. Melissa Cormacchia also offered a half day dance camp.

The Christmas Fair was a success with MERA groups contributing many excellent items for sale to support MERA.

We clarified the definition of the program committee: The Program Committee is the steering committee that takes charge of suggesting, vetting and arranging for activities, classes and special events. It meets 4-5 times a year. It is receptive to receiving ideas. All new proposals go through the Program Committee for discussion and refining before being passed on to the Administrator for final agreements and publicity.

We wrote up a contract for Workshops, with a few clarifications for how to set up the event. A list of recommendations for cooks for the winter dinners was posted to the website.

Goals for the Coming Year

There are always new ideas circulating in the committee meetings. Here are few possible ideas for 2019-2020: Winter Workshop series, film nights, open mic entertainment to possibly replace Around the World dinners.

New programs that started this winter include Yoga and Healing Arts.

We are in the process of writing up a contract/procedures page for instructors of class series.

We will continue to work with the fund-raising committee and the Board of Directors to develop programs that help MERA function financially as well as creatively.

Submitted by: Helen Mogford

MERA Pottery Cooperative Report

We have a really great line up of items to report from our little studio this year.

Over the course of 2018, we have grown to 24 active members which is exactly double the fun of 2017 where we saw 12 active. Two of these new memberships were families new to the area. We welcome them to the community and are very happy that they have chosen MERA to chase their creative talents and to share new and fresh ideas. As a result of these new members, many a friendship have been discovered and fabulous ideas and initiatives shared.

Formerly, we used our space Monday evenings and Wednesday Afternoons. We are now happy to report that we are using it more often. The studio is open Monday 7pm-9pm with Jan and company, Tuesday 1pm-3pm with Charlotte and Family, Wednesday mornings 10 to 12 with Lyndal and afternoons 1 pm to 3pm with Heather and the Lanark Home School Group as well as Thursday 7pm-9pm with anyone that would like to join us (Robin and Colleen). There is always room for one more. Hopefully once the weather warms up, we will see even more potters, especially on these evenings.

A small group has taken an interest in learning how to use the kiln, thanks so much to Linda for taking the time to present us with documents, instructions and an afternoon of hands on learning. As usual, Linda has really done so much for us with her knowledge and time on the technical side for sure. She has shared her knowledge of the workings of our kiln and creation of Glazes. Molly is still our revered Fairy Godmother. She always has something to show us and to share with us. She always brings a smile to the Studio adding a happy and comfortable experience for all. Lyndal, always willing to help us all and keep things exciting and all that she does to make the Studio a great place to be truly deserves a mention as well. We are so lucky to have such a lineup of wonderful human beings.

We have had a "teapot workshop" this past year that was truly amazing. Our instructor missed the day so Lyndal took charge, drew us a pattern on the chalkboard and said GO! What a fantastic day that yielded many unique and lovely teapots along with a potluck lunch like no other. We all expressed the desire to do to this more often and are planning up things to do for the next opportunity.

Our Annual Christmas Fair of 2018, saw us bring in \$130.00 to contribute and it was the first time the potters were in the MERA room for this event.

Our recent cleaning bee saw several of us working together to clean up, create new space, purge and take stock of all the wonderful tools and supplies we have collected. We somehow made cleaning fun, who would have ever thought!

Our Shelves continue to fill up quickly with new creations. It feels like Christmas every time the kiln is unloaded. It is really a sight to see finished work after watching the progress from clay to kiln. We all look forward to spending another year with the each other. Happy 2019.

Cheerfully Submitted on behalf of the M.E.R.A potters.

Arts Circle Report

Our group remains creatively and supportively active. We have added to our knowledge by having several successful courses given by Richard Hutton. In addition, we share our knowledge gained from the artistic 'how to' information available on the World Wide Web.

Attendance comes and goes, with 16 signed up depending how we fit it in to our busy lives. But it has settled into about 7 to 10 regulars.

We try to give back to MERA by participating in the Christmas Craft Fair and are presently trying to find unique ways to make that happen.

Each June we are grateful to be able to use Dean Hall to mount the results from our year's work.

We welcome new members knowing that they will enhance our skills and interests. We recognize how fortunate we are to have this wonderful local creative and supportive space.

Submitted by Gloria Shoebridge

Fibre Arts Report

Fibre artists meet at MERA on Thursdays during the fall, winter and spring. Spinners and knitters meet in the kitchen to work on their own projects.

Knitters are always willing to assist members with their projects. A core group of knitters donate knitted items to the MERA Christmas Fair.

A small group of 6 – 10 people kept the afternoon program going in the late winter and spring with some additional Craft Fair sale items made over the period. Specific workshops were offered by email to the revised list of Fibre Arts members. Cathie Huffman formed a new Crochet Club in late spring and offered instruction to beginners.

In early fall there was a potluck lunch to brainstorm ideas for Christmas Fair sale items. A series of weekly afternoon workshops were planned. The turnout for these workshops was large, reflected in the number of items for sale in the MERA room.

- beeswax-dipped cloth food storage wraps (Cathie Huffman and Janice Lever)
- needle-felted fridge magnets and bookmarks (Cathie Huffman)
- rustic straw animals and figures (Rosie Kotze)
- felted bears (Rosie Kotze)

- pine cone gnomes' heads topped with hats made by the Knitters (Cathie)
- shadow box mixed needle-felted oak branch (Wendy Dodd)

All these items were donated to the Christmas Fair – 100% profit for MERA.

The items created by the Fibre Arts group raised \$1166 The items created by the Knitters raised \$255

The 2019 fibre arts program is organized by Lynn Shwadchuck (acting program coordinator/communications), Susan Berlin (web content). Cathie Huffman is traveling, but is likely to be involved in the 2019 Christmas Fair.

Music Committee Report

There were 8 music concerts at MERA in 2018. It would be fair to say that 4 concerts were classical music and 4 were orientated towards the roots/folk & celtic musical styles.

The following concerts were organized by Tom Shoebridge for the Blue Jeans Classical Series:

- May 20, 2018 Trio Corventano: Classical Flute, Cello & Piano
- September 9, 2018 Paul Marleyn & Frederic Lacroix: Classical Cello & Piano
- October 14, 2018 Gertrude Letourneau & Catherine Donkin: Classical Flute & Piano
- November 11, 2018 Mark Valenti: Classical Piano

The quality of the performances for all these concerts was excellent. The performers were eager to interact with the audience, explaining the musical and historical contexts of the various pieces and the composers. It is unfortunate that audience numbers were below expectations for the Sept. 9 and Nov. 11 concerts. If you have been avoiding this series because classical music is stuffy and intimidating, we encourage you to bring an open mind and open ears, and be prepared to be delighted.

Total revenue for the Blue Jeans Classical Series was \$3225.00 against total expenses of \$2925.78(performer fees & SOCAN) resulting in a net profit of \$299.22 for MERA.

The following 4 concerts comprise last spring's Sunday Schoolhouse Series.

- March 11, 2018 Clan Hannigan: Irish & Celtic Folk
- March 25, 2018 Brian MacMillan: Singer/Songwriter
- April 8, 2018 Anni Sumi: Singer/Songwriter
- May 2, 2018 Maire Ni Chathasaigh & Chris Newman: Harp & Guitar

The first 3 concerts were organized by Danny Sullivan. The final concert was brought to MERA by Tom Shoebridge. Audience numbers for the March 11 and May 2 concerts were very strong and all the performances were well received.

Total revenue for the Sunday Schoolhouse Series was \$4082.00 versus expenses of \$3594.03(performer fees, advertising & SOCAN) resulting in a net profit of \$487.97 for MERA.

Danny Sullivan has subsequently retired to an advisory position with the music committee due to poor health. We are most grateful to have had the benefit of Danny's knowledge and connections that

resulted in a wonderfully diverse collection of musical delights arriving at MERA over the last decade. We wish him well and look forward to his counsel.

Thank you to the wizard of Wizard' Café, Michael Barnett, for supplying and serving treats and beverages at all the concerts. The café has become an essential part of the experience and a significant attraction in itself.

Looking ahead to 2019 there are 3 Sunday Schoolhouse concerts scheduled by Tom Shoebridge for the spring:

- February 24 – Postponed to March 2 – Tripod (Terry Tufts, Kathryn Briggs, Beth Tufts), paid attendance 50
- March 17 – James Keelaghan with Hugh McMillan - Sold Out
- April 14 – Oh Susanna – Sold Out

This is a most encouraging start with some well-respected performers. MERA's rural location mixed with nasty winter weather can result in some last-minute headaches as the above noted re-scheduling of the Tripod concert illustrates. The Tripod show was actually a sellout but refunds dropped attendance to a still respectable 50 tickets.

Stay tuned for news about the Blue Jeans Classical series this fall as Tom Shoebridge continues to work his magic.

Report prepared by Peter Cochrane, March 10, 2019

Heritage Weavers Report

---Financial contributions to MERA in 2018	\$921
Christmas Sale in Booth	151
Christmas Sale MERA	212
Table	
Lynn's Bunnies after sale	92
April 2018 Exhibit	186
Donation to raffle	280

We believe we could have done better at the Christmas sale with more space to display our goods.

We had comments to the effect that the sale was very crowded and people who wanted to see the weaving could not.

We are hoping for more space in 2019.

--We are planning an exhibit for April 2019

--What we have woven and are weaving

We have woven 5 blankets, 5 rag rugs, 10 t-towels, 2 ponchos and 3 overshot cushions

On the looms now are warps for more rugs, ponchos and cushions

We have plans for warps for more rugs and t-towels

---Members

Currently there are 10 active members, 2 less active members, and one new member

Lynn S is mentoring two of our newer members

Building Committee Report

We have created this committee to assist & support David Wilson, who is our maintenance person, as well to help ensure MERA is in great shape and to work with the Township for efficiently. For example, the troll house was repaired thanks to Peter and Barry. The members are Peter Cochrane, Barry Russel, Patti-jo Wilson and David Wilson. If you see any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact any of the members.

Fundraising Committee Report

A MERA reality! All our ongoing activities and membership fees do not generate enough money to cover MERA's operating expenses. With very few exceptions, all programs and activities contribute income for MERA. However, the margins and the financial benefits of most activities are generally slight. The Christmas Art & Craft Fair and the Around the World Suppers are our most dependable annual events financially, together contributing perhaps 18% of the money required to balance the books. Memberships account for another 18% and all other regular activities 44%. That leaves 20% or \$8,000 to be made up by fundraising activities.

What are our choices?

Increasing the cost to members for the use of MERA such as even higher membership fees, charges for access to the facilities, higher ticket cost for music events, etc. is likely to discourage too many people in our community. We have already noticed this effect with the current increase in membership fees.

Several years ago when the Ontario Arts Council first stopped offering operating grants, members were asked to pledge donations for three years. This campaign generated enough funds to help cover MERA's annual operating expenses. In 2016 the pledge campaign had expired and was replaced by a successful David Francey concert and the Labyrinth Project. The Labyrinth Project was carried through into 2017 but the response proved disappointing and a deficit of over \$4,400 was incurred that year. It was not until the fall of 2018 that the MERA Supporter Campaign was initiated. A deficit of \$2,255 was incurred in 2018.

To avoid a deficit for this year a persistent appeal to members for donations will have to continue, but needs to be supplemented by activities to reach out to the larger community. The Fundraising Committee is working with the Program Committee to create low risk programs that can raise money such as a concert to replace the semi-annual David Francey concert that brought in considerable funds.

The Fundraising Committee will be meeting in April to consider appeals to other community groups and businesses. But who is this committee? A couple of board members are the core and a couple of other members have contributed, but the creativity needed for successful fundraising needs more people - more volunteers - to generate ideas and contacts. Volunteers are the backbone of MERA. Please consider joining this committee as your volunteer contribution to the success of MERA.

Judy Watts
Peter Cochrane