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Shakespeare Festival gets boost from provincial council

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In the words of Shakespeare, to climb steep hills requires a slow pace at first.

Those words ring true for the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival as they are in their ninth season of operation this year and have been awarded an Ontario Arts Council (OAC) grant.

On Saturday night during the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival Valentine's Dinner fundraiser at the Prescott Golf Club, Leeds-Grenville MPP Steve Clark presented festival artistic director Ian Farthing with the theatre organizational operating grant.

"Ninety-five per cent of people in Ontario said arts and activities help enrich the quality of lives," Clark noted as he turned over the grant, which was in excess of \$24,000.

"We're really excited," said Farthing. "It's a sign the province is starting to get behind this festival. It's a great step forward for us."

The fundraiser was sold out and Farthing said the support behind the festival was overwhelming.

"We've gotten a lot of project grants," he said. "This is the first year we've been invited to apply for the OAC grant."

Farthing is hoping to keep the name of Shakespeare alive in the off-season.

"We are going long-term," said Farthing. "The goal is year-round events that provide the best of theatre that we can."

There will be a play called Toad presented in May and June.

"We're going to explore things that aren't Shakespeare," Farthing said.

This year will see Twelfth Night and All's Well That Ends Well on this year's stage in the summer.

New this year is a Wednesday afternoon matinee.

"We're growing and this is a way we can see how many people are interested in this," said Farthing.

There is also a Sunday series of four dates planned entitled "Love in the Afternoon" that will bring Shakespeare in song, a new feature this year. It is a one-hour performance of songs that have been inspired by Shakespeare's plays.

This summer will see many familiar actors return to the Prescott stage.

Quincy Armorer is one of those returning actors.

"When I was here, I never felt like I was at work," said Armorer. "There is something here that offers something that Stratford can't."

"I love this community. I love the people. There is a family feel here," Armorer. "When I was here, I was treated like a king, and I'll take it again."

The silent auction that was held during the dinner raised unofficially more than \$7,000.

"It was a very successful night," Farthing said.

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