Muskoka Mosaic: Introducing Martina Schroer



FINDING INSPIRATION: Martina Schroer takes a moment to enjoy the flowers in her garden. The Huntsville woman, who volunteers her time for many different organizations, says her favourite things are flowers,

Lake of Bays hosting public meetings on strategic plan could say they are advising the consultants, but the

Community members to help direct process

Lake of Bays residents will get three chances to give input toward the township's strategic plan.

The municipality will host a series of public meetings at various locations throughout the township, planner Stefan Szczerbak told council at its June 9

The dates and locations are July 14 from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at the Baysville Community Centre, July 16 from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. at the Dorset Community Centre and July 18 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Dwight Community Centre.

The meeting will be the one of the first opportunities residents will have to participate in the strategic plan process. Szczerbak said ratepayers can start their involvement by filling out an online questionnaire on the township's website (www.lakeofbays.on.ca) about their ideas regarding the strategic plan.

The strategic plan will include the community's priorities as they pertain to the services the municipal government provides and items of importance to the community at large. It will also help council focus on and strategize long-term projects.

Szczerbak said that representatives from ICA Associates of Toronto, the company hired to develop the township's strategic plan, will direct the three meet-

He added that a public advisory group was formed late last month to give input into the process - but not the strategic plan - and encourage community participation. A member from ICA Associates, Szczerbak and Councillor Ginny Burgess, selected five people from 19 submissions from members of the public who wanted to sit as committee members.

The criteria for selection were based on their connection to their community networks, the ward where they reside or the association they represent and their ability to assist the group.

The group includes Burgess as council's representative, Kelly Haywood (Sinclair Ward), Herb Hickling (Dorset), Fred Landry (Baysville), Marie Poirier (Dwight) and Deb Cumming (Lake of Bays Associa-

"This group will help us get the word out there about the process," said Szczerbak. "They have been selected to ensure we have coverage throughout the municipality. They will also help give us a fresh set of eyes to the questions that will be put out there. You

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For Martina Schroer, there's nothing as important and inspiring as flowers, books, children and music. "I'm passionate about the beautiful things in life," she says.

Schroer joined the Huntsville Association for the Performing Arts about a decade ago and has been president for the past eight years. The organization, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2010, offers a variety of concerts each year. "We present exquisite music performed by exceptional Canadian musicians," she says.

When Schroer was growing up in Toronto after her family emigrated from Germany, she and her three younger brothers were always taken to the Toronto Symphony in winter and the Stratford Festival in summer. "Although we were not doing that well financially, my parents thought it was important," she says.

Schroer played both piano and violin and sang in choirs for years.

However, Schroer's interests are broad, and she is an active volunteer for many different organizations. She was one of the founding members of the Huntsville Train Station Society in 2002, has been on the board of the Muskoka Parry Sound Community Mental Health Services for six years, and does telephone work for both Muskoka Seniors and SAIL, a sexual assault

Schroer has also been a member of Amnesty International since she was 20. "I'm actively involved by writing letters on behalf of prisoners of conscience around the world," she says. "These people are imprisoned for voicing their opinions. Freedom of speech is such an important human right. I can write; I can afford the stamp. If this helps even one person to gain their freedom, it's worth it."

Having lived with multiple sclerosis for a number of years, Schroer is emphatic that she is not her illness. "There's always a silver lining to everything," she says. "If you find it you can cope with just about anything.

Not being able to work anymore has given Schroer the chance to volunteer her time freely and meet many wonderful people, she says, adding, "People are so interesting. It doesn't matter who you meet,

about everybody."

It was that attitude that led her to develop a creative arts program called Through Children's Eyes.

After meeting her husband Peter Darling and teaching elementary school for the East Parry Sound Board, Schroer decided to go back to school in 1979 to get a second undergraduate degree in theatre arts. "I wanted to continue working with children but focus on the arts," she explains.

In 1981, she moved to Huntsville and founded Through Children's Eyes, which provided an opportunity for children to experience life through the arts. "I wanted to add something to young people's lives that allowed them to express themselves more freely, "Schroer says. Nine years later, Schroer had 125 students enrolled on a weekly basis, and they gave performances of original scripts as far away as North Bay.

After Schroer's daughter Victoria was born in 1984 – "The happiest day of my life," she says - the baby sometimes came along to evening classes, where there were lots of built-in babysitters.

During these years, Schroer also provided children's programming for the Muskoka Festival "As part of my 'pay,' I was thrilled to be able to go to any play free of charge all summer long," she says.

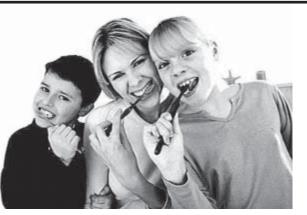
However, in 1989, now a single mother, Schroer was emotionally and financially depleted. She returned to the GTA for a decade, where she taught special needs kids. "One of my dreams is to someday write a children's book about those amazing students,'

"They were beautiful singers, artists, storytellers. They all had incredible abilities.

Schroer has been back in Huntsville since 1999, and she is excited about the changes that have taken place here since the early '80s. "This town is blossoming," she says. "It's an incredibly

And every day, she says, she feels blessed to be living such a good life: "I wake up every morning and think, 'Okay, world, inspire

Thanks to Bob Attfield for recommending that Martina Schroer



plan will be developed by the consultants."

we go forward in this process," she stated.

tion of the strategic plan process.

the three public meetings.

approval, said Szczerbak.

Burgess said she would hope residents, including

"This (process) is really, really important and we

Szczerbak reported that the consultant is work-

councillors, will be heavily involved in the public por-

need to get all the information that counts, to use as

ing with staff and the advisory group to create the

communications strategy. This strategy includes the

creation of a formal website dedicated to the process

and linked to the township website, contact groups, advertisements, survey tools, times and locations of

cess includes a diverse and multi-sectored recruit-

ment to assist with a successful public strategic plan-

cil sometime in the fall or early winter for possible

The idea is to have the plan presented to coun-

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure this pro-

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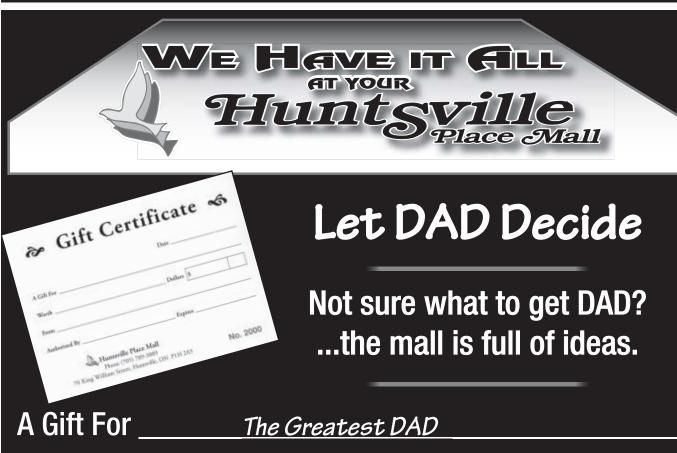
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