

Kitchener's Festival of Neighbourhoods 2017 Celebration

John MacDonald's Remarks

Welcome, and thank you. Once a year we celebrate our Festival here at City Hall, reminding all of us that community is ours together, to care for and grow as a team.

You are a cherished part of our team.

On behalf of the Festival, I'd like to extend a further thanks to other members of this team:

The founding festival partners

- the City of Kitchener, and more particularly its Community Services Department. Marla Pender, Facilitator of Volunteer Resources par excellence, and Rebecca Florence, Volunteer Engagement Associate most capable!
- The Social Development Centre of Waterloo Region, under its leadership of Trudy Beaulne, Executive Director, and its Board of Directors
- my firm, John MacDonald Architect, and our staff, most prominently Margaret Santos

Our Festival Co-ordinator, Aleksandra Petrovic Graonic, who has worked throughout the Festival Season to communicate with all of you and more, to assist, sometimes to challenge, and to support your efforts in reaching to your neighbours.

And thank you to our summer student, Zoe Dunbar, for her above and beyond efforts this year.

To our award sponsors and the City of Kitchener goes our special thanks for their financial support, both ongoing and new. Together we know the difference these firms and individuals make when they step off their front porches and help provide our capacity for this initiative.

So, How do you do?

It's a timeless question, and one we traditionally ask of others immediately that we meet them, and so I ask it of you. *Why is that?*

Well, I'm thinking it's because it's the most important question we could possibly ask of one another, and I often return to this thought when discussing the Festival initiative.

Not *what do you do*, or *what have you done*, but **HOW** are you doing it. Each of us, in our daily lives and interaction with others, has choices and capacity to reach out from our own life experience, opinion, culture and identity, with genuine curiosity about the values and attitudes that inform how others do, how they approach their particular relationship to the community we are creating and to which we belong.

For 24 years the Festival's mission has been to foster and grow an annual community tradition that encourages, recognizes and celebrates citizens coming together across diversity in their neighbourhoods. For many of us, this tradition is now firmly established. For some of us, we have come to it newly, or again after an absence. Regardless of how you've got here, and what you've done, I'd like to thank you all, on behalf of Kitchener's Festival of

Neighbourhoods, **for how you've done it.**

Let's take a moment to give ourselves a huge round of applause, for How we've done!

I'd like to take a moment if I may to reflect on the Festival, and it's continuing relevance for us all.

How do you do?

That's the most important aspect of this whole bowl of fruit you've created, the kernel of your achievement, the life saving ring you've grabbed, the mountain you've climbed. **I dunno. Insert your analogy here!** Whatever works for you in describing this reaching outward from your own experience to that of others who are not like you, who may not share your passions, who may disagree with certain ideas, but who fundamentally believe, to paraphrase and grow from that time-honoured thought by Rabbi Hillel:

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when? The Festival and your reach to others helps us complete and compliment that thought with its intended corollaries:

If I am not for others, who will be for me? If I do not reach for others, who will reach for me? And if not now, when?

REACH! is a continuing theme for us. The Festival has in recent years been zeroing in on the essence of our message and challenge, and we've decided to continue this emphasis, and the **REACH!** theme onward into next year, the quarter century mark for the Festival. We want to highlight, to celebrate, and to challenge all of us to actions that connect across diversity, in a present world where this need is more important than ever.

24 years ago our founding partnership felt that there were enormous forces in our communities that reinforced the strength we gain through our common attitudes and associations, but perhaps at the expense of the strength that is possible with ties, with understanding, and with empathy that reaches outward to engage with ideas, culture, circumstance, and experience which is different from our own.

These forces of common association are with us still, and their ability to divide us, to group us into camps and support our tendency to retreat into corners as if we must defend rather than engage are stronger than ever:

- in our pre-conceptions and mis-conceptions
- in our use of social media
- in our everyday interactions with others and with the idea of the public.

So too though is our determination, as a community, to overcome these forces and reap the rewards of diversity. We think you, as some of the many people who step out each day and on special days into your streets and community to reach others **unlike** yourself, are the real heroes of the Festival, and the accomplishers of this goal.

So Thank you, for How you Do!