

arts and entertainment

MUSIC

Watsonairs history comes to Museum archives after Coffee and Conversation

MICHAEL OLEKSYN
DAILY HERALD

The rich 67-year history of the Watsonairs Choral Group was the topic of discussion at the Prince Albert Historical Museum's Coffee and Conversation on Sunday, Dec. 18.

Longtime member Teena Polle and group president Louise Kirzinger gave the presentation. Kirzinger said the group was told the Historical Museum had minimal history on the Watsonairs. The two presenters were happy to help fill the gap.

"That's what we're here for today: to get into their archives," Polle said.

"You want to know in 30 years from now that we existed."

The pair split the presentation into two halves with Polle covering the Watsonairs from their founding until the early 1990s and Kirzinger discussing the more recent era.

The Watsonairs were founded by Kathleen Watson in 1956. Ever since, they have been providing women in the community an opportunity to



Watsonairs member Teena Polle covered the early years of the Choral Group's history during Coffee and Conversation at the Prince Albert Historical Museum on Sunday.

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sing, perform and give back through music. They are the longest continuously operating choral group in the province.

"She (Watson) was a very renowned voice teacher and a piano teacher in town," Polle explained. "She was also the teacher of John Vickers, the Opera singer.

"We had our first concert in the Or-

pheum Theatre, which is where the CKBI radio station is right now on central on 13th St. and from then on, she just had these wonderful spring concerts. She was with us till 1964 and then she retired and we had our one of our members Gladys Strom. She took over and she was with us for over 40 years after that."

Strom's last performance was in

2005. The Watsonairs honoured her retirement with a final concert.

For a group that has been around for 67 years the Watsonairs have had very few directors. Current interim director Amy Robinson came from being an accompanist this year to replace May Janzen who stepped away for health reasons. Before that, only Watson and Strom acted as directors of the group.

Robinson continues a long tradition of the Watsonairs finding conductors in the group joining both Strom and Janzen.

"Gladys was taken from the ranks and she became the director. May was a member of the choir, she became director. Amy was the pianist, and she became the director, and the lady who is the pianist now sings the second soprano," Kirzinger said.

The Watsonairs get talent from around the area with members coming from Shellbrook and Janzen originally travelling from Porcupine Plain when she began singing with the group.

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Both Polle and Kirzinger said there was a lot of talent in the area, which helped grow their ranks.

After the presentation concluded, members and former members who were present located themselves in the many photos from the slide show. Former member Michelle Waldbillig from Melfort made the trip to watch the presentation.

Over the last 67 years, the group has supported the girl guides, the Arts Centre, the YWCA, the Victoria Hospital, group homes, the purchase of musical instruments at Pine Grove, The Heritage Centre, Herb Basset Home, Pineview Terrace, Sherman Towers, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church and the EA Rawlinson Centre. They also provide an annual scholarship awarded at the Prince Albert Music Festival.

"It's not just our musicality, we over the course of our history have been supporters of the community, including donating pianos and keyboards scholarship and bursaries at the music festival," Kirzinger explained.

They also took over the former Rotary Carol Festival and have made it the Watsonairs Christmas Carol Festival 32 years ago. All proceeds from the event go towards the Salvation Army Cheer Fund.

The Watsonairs were responsible for the purchase of the grand concert piano that currently resides at the EA Rawlinson Centre for the Arts after setting aside money each year towards the project.

"That was that was Gladys' vision,



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Members of the Watsonairs Choral Group led the audience in Christmas carols to conclude the Coffee and Conversation at the Prince Albert Historical Museum on Sunday.

and that piano was purchased by the Watsonairs," Kirzinger said.

The presentation concluded with several members who were present leading the audience in Christmas Carols.

"That's what we do," Polle said. "It's Christmas, so there's some Christmas caroling with the Watsonairs tonight."

All the data from the presentation was entered into the Bill Smiley Archives afterwards. Kirzinger said

she expects the group to keep going strong in the years ahead.

"After 68 years, I don't think we're ending anytime soon..

michael.oleksyn@paherald.sk.ca