

Mainstreet program reflects culture

by Rob Cribb

Halifax's North End community is preparing for the Gottingen Street Area Mainstreet Program, which will take place over the next few weeks in and around the North End.

The program consists of a series of projects designed to reflect the cultural, ethnic and racial diversity of the community through the creative efforts of North End residents, and to use the arts to help deal with problems of school and community.

The Artists in Residence Program is comprised of 13 artists, whose talents range from native art to rap music, all interested in providing avenues through which people can express their creativity.

One of those artists, David Woods, is a published writer, as well as coordinator of the Mainstreet Program. Woods says "the program has allowed us to take artists, writers, dancers, and creative people in the community and get them to work with young people to come up with creative projects that reflect the history, culture, and energy of people in this area."

The projects the program will support include a drama production, combining music, dance, original story, and acting workshops; a North End Stories project which will attempt to interpret the community through creative writing; and a Rap Music project with formal instruction in song composition, performance, musical arrangement, and recording. Some of the other projects include a Mural Project, an Illustrated Book, an Art Display, a Video Project, and a Popular Dance Project.

Woods says the projects are "a way of stimulating people's imaginations and getting them to look at themselves and their community."

The Mainstreet Programme was initially conceived by Joe Stern, a community worker in Halifax's North End. He felt the need for this kind of project, and helped acquire funding.

In addition to setting up the program, Woods has attempted to create a community board which is responsive to the idea. Since coming into existence, the

program has become an identifiable and unique element of the community. "We have consulted with schools, young people, and various community organizations who have all given input,

in creativity above and beyond whether they can attract professional attention."

One of the goals of the program is to provide an opportunity for artists, who might not otherwise

have the chance, to be recognized for what they do in a meaningful way. Many of the participants, such as the modern dance group and the rap group, simply don't have an established forum for their art, and this program is allowing them to share their work in a professional situation.

"This project attempts to look at what you do and appreciate it," Woods says, "whereas if they were trying to do something on a larger level, they would be asked for their professional credentials."

Woods emphasizes we have to take into account the various cultural differences which affect the way in which we perceive art. "There are different processes that apply to different people and we sometimes forget that other processes are legitimate because we impose our own judgments on what is important." Woods says many people in the north end are often burdened by racist stereo-

types and there is an need to let the community know they are important.

At the heart of this program lies a strong desire to expand and alter perceptions — not only about how black culture thinks about itself, but also how it is perceived from the outside.

Most of the discussion about Gottingen Street in Halifax has traditionally had to do with the slumping business district or the unattractive physical features of the area. Woods points out "these arguments seem to neglect the thousands and thousands of people whose lives and histories have been embedded in this neighbourhood, as if the only worth of it is making it look good."

"This project doesn't bypass the people to create an image of the people. It says 'What you are is legitimate and we're going to help you express that'."



shaped and defined this whole thing ... it is a very community reflective process," says Woods.

When dealing with the arts, Woods makes it clear that we have to recognize two different levels of participation. "There is the professional level, where people are essentially working to earn money, but there is also the level where people create, regardless of whether they have published books or have movies out."

"This project is much more about that process. It's about people who are creative and involved

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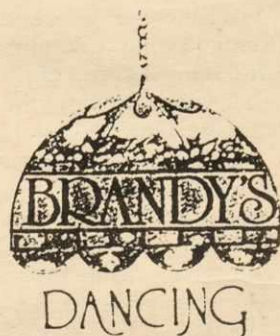
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