

NCRA Community Radio Awards

Submission for 2022 CRABO Award for Excellence in Community Engagement

Submitting Station, CKHA, 100.9 Canoe FM, Haliburton, Ontario

Our station broadcasts to Haliburton County (aka The Haliburton Highlands), a region in Central Ontario of over 4,000 square kilometers that comprises 4 municipalities serving an average population of 17,000. It is known as a tourist destination, with the population swelling over the summer months to around 45,000 and is renowned primarily for its scenery and its resident artists. A significant part of the 'arts scene' is also live theatre, most notably in the summer with the advent each year of the Highlands Summer Festival, but also throughout the year with smaller local groups.

The onset of the pandemic in the Spring of 2020 naturally caused a huge upheaval in the live theatre schedule, with one group, the Highlands Little Theatre, having to abandon a planned performance just one week prior to showtime. It has not been until now, starting in the summer of 2022, that productions have been able to come back on stream. To fill that void, one of our on-air hosts, Rita Jackson, in March 2021, came forward to the station with an idea of how to 're-engage' theatre – to put the theatre groups, local playwrights, actors and their audiences back together. Rita, with a long background in theatre primarily as a performer, felt an urgent need to avoid losing that 'thrill of theatre' for all those involved.

Her idea, to go back to the 'old days' of radio theatre, was immediately appealing to us. Her proposal was to approach the local theatre groups and invite them to produce radio adaptations of various plays. For the station this not only introduced a new dimension, with wide appeal, for our broadcast schedule but it also engaged a significant segment of our artistic community and enabled them to practice their art, albeit in a different form. While the focus would be toward the works of local playwrights, the groups were also free to choose commercially-available offerings suited to our radio audience. These would then be adapted for radio and recorded, in settings that respected all COVID protocols, for regular monthly broadcasts. With the assistance of our Station Production Manager we were able to take these recordings, provide edits and sound effects as needed, and finally package them into one-hour shows to meet broadcast standards.

In addition to these 'live' broadcasts, Rita also suggested the use of genuine old-time, publicly-available, radio broadcasts from the 40's, 50's and 60's to supplement the schedule. These pre-recorded shows, typically series such as 'Tales from the Black Museum' hosted by Orson Welles, would then provide some continuity while the various theatre groups worked on their radio adaptations. This idea was also supported by the fact that a significant segment of our station listening base is the 65-plus age group, people who can either remember themselves, or identify through their parents, what 'old-time radio' was all about.

The result has been, starting in April of 2021, a regular monthly series of broadcasts under the name of 'Radio Playhouse'. Further, for the month of December 2021, Christmas stories were inserted into the schedule. These were designed to appeal to all age groups, with stories such as "The Grinch", "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" and "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" to name just a few.

All the local theatre groups (see list below) have been, and continue to be, involved as well as a pick-up group of actors collectively referred to as the 'Playhouse Players'. Broadcasts are also stored on our website so that those unable to listen at the advertised times can still enjoy 'the thrill of theatre' – or 'theatre for the ears' as Rita likes to also refer to it.

Rita, together with her husband John (also a theatre performer), continues to help source new material that can be adapted for recording and engage the groups as necessary. And feedback from our listeners has been nothing but positive, so 'Radio Playhouse' looks like it may well be with us for some time to come, even when true live theatre is finally back here in the Haliburton Highlands.

For CKHA, 100.9 Canoe FM,

Roxanne Casey, Station Manager

Theatre Groups involved:

- Highlands Little Theatre
- Highlands Summer Festival
- Rural Rogues
- The New Normal, Retro Division
- The Playhouse Players (actors from across the County, and beyond)

Attached:

- Audio file including samples from all of the participating groups
- Supporting letters of recommendation