



The Communicator

A Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce Publication

Issue: 2008, Volume 3

Looking Back and Taking it Forward

By Cory King, Executive Director

Perhaps it is because the time of year lends itself to it, or maybe it's a subconscious need to re-evaluate spurred on by the endless entertainment countdown specials across seemingly every television station and print publication, but I have always liked to look back around the first of the year, to the one just past and take time to remember what made it is so special. I remember as a child, when I was learning about the days and months and years, I had this innocent revelation that seemed so profound. I realized that whatever day and year it was, that that was the only day and year there would ever be (meaning if today is January 17, 2008 there will never be another January 17, 2008). Since then, I have tried to do one thing that is special or unique to make each day it's own. As I look back I don't know if I succeeded with my goal, I like to think in little ways that I made at least the slightest effort to make each day meaningful, but as I get older I realize that it is not the individual days that you count by, but rather years. So each year, around this time, I try to look back, not in a search of answers or to dwell on opportunities gained or lost, and not to see if I reached a particular goal or not; and certainly not to grade the past years' accomplishments against any other year and determine if it was better or worse, because life isn't about grading and ranking your memories. I do it mostly to smile, and so I know that 2008 had meaning, and often I find that some things that seemed so significant were not at all, and other things that seemed so inconsequential at the time, in hindsight are so ultimately relevant.

Now, here's the catch- I could try to describe the things that happened to me personally, and try to tell you why those had meaning, but I struggle to think that you would find it interesting or in any way valuable or meaningful to you. Therefore, feel glad that you won't have to be bothered with tales of a severe Memorial Day weekend sunburn, the Celtics playoff run or the idiosyncrasies of stage life at Lakewood including the duality of wearing a winter coat on stage on a 100 degree day and rip away jeans on a 40 degree September night. However, there are so many things in my work life at the Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce that either were glanced past or glazed over, that only now that I stop to look back, can I truly appreciate them.

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Annual Dinner Set for January 17 *Membership Invited to Honor Best of 2008*

The Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet has been set for Saturday January 17, 2008 at T & B's Celebration Center on Route 201. Tickets for the event are available for purchase now at the Chamber office. Ballots have already gone out and the return date for all ballots is at noon on Monday, January 12th. If you have not received a ballot yet please contact the Chamber office. Ballots are available to all members in good standing and we take the awards very seriously as it is the sole time of the year when we get to specifically honor those businesses and individuals who have made our chamber so successful in the past year. However, just like in many years, there are no clear cut favorites for awards this year as all of the nominees were truly supportive and engaged in the development of our Chamber over the past year, and we are excited to receive the final totals so we can see who is chosen by the membership to be honored. Whether you are an honoree or just someone who is involved and wants to continue to be so in the near future, we encourage you to accept out invitation for the Annual Banquet. It will be an entertaining and informative evening when we will update the entire membership in attendance on goals we have attained this past year, those we are still working towards and the things we aim to accomplish as we move forward. Tickets are the same price as last year in hopes of making the attendance remain strong.

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Please pay attention to important updates within the inserts including FAB Fair applications!!

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Looking ... Forward (cont. form page

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First would be the little moments that snuck up on me, the little surprises that if I wasn't moving so quickly I would have seen coming, but at least when they stopped me in my tracks I recognized their significance. This started in the beginning of 2008, and our Annual Dinner and the well wishes I received from so many members of a good year to come, and the appreciation of the local award-winning businesses and volunteers. I mean as a human being you realize how much people appreciate recognition, but to see their faces and their smiles when their names are called, is something different entirely. Other moments that stuck with me include, the attentiveness of the school children at the assembly with the Harlem Rockets player, the mixture of laughter and screams from the Haunted Hayride wagons, the overwhelming turnout of our first year of Bike Night, the sheer determination of the Bed Race contestants and the awe-inspired gazes of the children with Santa just a few weeks ago. In each instance, although I knew we were doing things that brought the community together, and help provide memories for families and friends, the honest, raw reality of it all is stirring, and powerful, and I don't think we should take that for granted- it is to be celebrated.

The second brand of memories come from the moments that I didn't realize were as significant as they ended up being. A vivid memory of this was when I was talking to my friend Erik Thomas of Sweet People Productions, who was discussing wanting to bring a show to Skowhegan Opera House, namely Grace Potter & the Nocturnals. Although I hadn't heard of them I was willing to listen and help get the word out. When Riverfest weekend came and there were over 500 people in the Skowhegan Opera House, I began to realize the significance. However, it wouldn't come full circle until just weeks ago when I heard that along with getting nationally-recognized folk artist Dar Williams in early December, we also have booked bluesman Johnny Winter for Valentine's Day 2009, and Ani DiFranco in April. After years of renovations and effort of so many, our Opera House emerged in 2008. Other significant moments that were unexpectedly prideful for our area this year include how beautifully the downtown Renaissance Center turned out to be, the success of the area high school sports teams, and the new businesses in the area that continue to choose this region to stake their future to.

Lastly, are the moments that were never expected. These come from so many different places and they are usually the most impactful and rewarding. These memories range from the vehicle that pulls up after an exhausting teardown of Moonlight Madness and the driver says, "I just stopped to tell you that you guys did a great job", it's the hand-written letter in the mail that says thank you for your help, or thank you for the scholarship, it's a funny e-mail during an over-worked day or pizza with friends after a long, cold event. It's the volunteers saying they'll cover the office for the day, or a donation from a stranger or a friend; a visitor that tells you how nice your town looks or an old member coming back on board because they like the direction the Chamber is headed in; it's a free up of coffee, a check-in phone call, an appreciative handshake or even sometimes a hug. When it comes down to it, all the memories of 2008 for me, revolve around our community coming together and the idea that if you give of yourself, others will give back in turn. Does that mean we had a perfect year- no problems, no setbacks- of course not. However, for the things that really mattered, when it came right down to it, we had a pretty successful year and one that we can grow on as we move forward. I hope that during your reflective time in the next few weeks that you can recall all of your time well spent, and of sincere memories made. I hope you carry with you all the smiles and laughter and leave behind any bitterness or ill will as we move on into 2009. But most of all, I hope that you cherished the time spent with your friends and family and payed attention to all of those moments that we too often overlook, and appreciate them while they happen, because those are things memories are made of.



Santa's arrival during the Holiday Stroll

Dar Williams a Success- And More to Come

Three More Shows Booked in the Next Four Months

At the Skowhegan Area Chamber of Commerce, one of our goals is to keep the membership informed about the popular trends that are affecting our businesses along with sharing positive stories that are helping our area grow. In the past two months, there has not been a single day that has passed in the Chamber office without a phone call or an inquiry about what is happening at the Skowhegan Opera House. Therefore, even though we have covered the amazing talent that has been booked and performed on the stage, it is too newsworthy to deny from this publication, as it is the hottest news in town right now. With 2008 completely in our rear view, and coming off the swells of yet another well attended performance from a nationally acclaimed artist, we find ourselves looking forward to what the 2009 horizon has in store for us.

First to give a quick recap on 'An Evening with Dar Williams', which graced the stage on Sunday, December 14. The show was opened in beautiful fashion with Maine singer-songwriter Ellen Tipper who played original music accompanying herself on piano. Being from Appleton, Ellen amazed the crowd with her voice and lyrics and was an ideal compliment to what Dar was going to bring. When the headliner made her appearance the audience was grateful and taken away with her on a journey of music and poetry. Dar was gracious to the crowd and many songs ended in a booming cascade of applause. The most overwhelming part was the number of people in attendance, namely over 450 people, making it one of the most popular shows of the year.

Hopefully all of the success of 2008 rolls over into 2009 and that will only lead to getting more acts in the Skowhegan Opera House. Chronologically, the next offering is coming Saturday January 10th in a double-headlining show with the Rustic Overtones & John Brown's Body. The concert will be general admission with tickets in advance at \$20 and \$25 at the door. Both bands will be playing full-length sets so rather than the first band playing a shorter opening followed by the headliner, both bands will groove you for approximately the same amount of time. It should be kept in mind that during this show people might rush the stage and that seats further away from the stage might be more desirable for those who plan on remaining seated. As anyone who has been there knows, there are really no bad seats anywhere in the opera house in terms of obstructed views.

The biggest buzz currently would have to go to the Valentine's Day show with blues-rock legend Johnny Winter and his band along with special guest Samuel James. James, is an up and comer in blues circles, has released two albums and he is still in his twenties. His style of blues comes from his upbringing having a father and a grandfather who used to pick and play the blues and Samuel has been performing since he was 12. Johnny Winter, is a man who needs few introductions, as he has lived the life of blues-rock legends, he has played with many if not all of the greats, and in doing so is widely considered at the top of that class. He brings 30+ years of experience and life lessons to the stage, and this could be our biggest show thus far. Tickets are on sale now at the Chamber office and are selling for \$36.00 of general admission.

The last great show that is lined up (for April 18th), does not have tickets on sale yet but is very worth mentioning, simply for the name factor. Ani DiFranco is one of the preeminent folk artists of her generation and an inspiration to nearly all folk artists in the last decade at least, and she is still yet to reach 40. She has been playing in public since she was a teenager and released her first album on her own record label when she was 20. Known throughout the world, Ani is considered a pioneer not only for her lyrics but her musical stylings that have transformed folk music over the years. For those that loved Dar Williams, Ani DiFranco is for you.

So as you can see, the Skowhegan Opera House just keeps rolling along. With the success the Opera House had in 2008, we are starting to see what rewards that brings with so many events in 2009 already. This list also doesn't include the other offerings at the Opera House with local shows like the dance recitals in the spring and other local acts. There is so much good on the horizon and if you like being entertained and you like having extra visitors and business in town, then there is a lot to love with what is happening at the Skowhegan Opera House. If you would like more information please contact the Chamber office at 474-3621.

Upcoming Events at the Skowhegan Opera House

<p>Sweet People Productions proudly presents <i>Rustic Overtones</i> & <i>John Brown's Body</i> In a Double Headliner Show Saturday, January 10 Tickets are \$20 in Advance \$25 at the Door Available at: The Skowhegan Area Chamber Office 474- 3621</p>	<p>Nor'easter Productions proudly presents <i>Johnny Winter Band</i> with <i>Special Guest Samuel James</i> The Blues-Rock Legend comes to Skowhegan Saturday, February 14 at 8:00 pm Tickets are \$36.00 General Admission Available at: The Skowhegan Area Chamber Office 474- 3621</p>	<p>Der Simonian Consulting proudly presents <i>Ani Di Franco</i> Folk Pioneer Graces the Stage Saturday, April 18 Tickets Information to be Released</p>
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FAB Fair Date Set For February 21

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Chamber Aims to Grow Event Even More than Last Year

Nothing quite puts the community into 'Community Events' quite like the FAB Fair, the traditional business and craft fair that the Chamber puts on every February. Last year, the Events committee saw an increase in participation and attendance and aims to build on that this year to ensure even greater success. The FAB Fair, also known as the Fun And Business Fair, was called the SCAG Fair years ago, and the organizers hope to build the FAB Fair and make it as popular as the old SCAG Fair used to be. Some great steps towards that end were taken last year with some changes that injected some energy and excitement into the event, and the hope is to continue some of that moving forward into the next installment.

The date has been finalized and everyone is encouraged to attend. **Saturday February 21 is the date**, and it should be even bigger than last year. Although some new changes are still being discussed within the committee, here are some of the definite changes for the 2009 edition. First and foremost, the booth space charges will remain the same as last year. With the economy in flux and times being tight, it was decided that the best thing for all is to keep prices steady. Secondly, one of our very popular changes from last year will again be the focus this year with 'interactivity' being the key phrase. Last year we recruited several businesses to the FAB Fair and asked them to get interactive, what transpired was several other booths and businesses joining in the interactive theme as we had over a dozen booths that we geared completely to being interactive. Their were free samples, putting for a hole-in-one, the Skowhegan PD and their intoxication glasses, makeovers, basketball shots and so much more. This provided energy and excitement to the event.

The third definite decision that has been made is to bring back the "Chamber Bingo" game. This idea was simple- get a prize (last year a television) that can only be won playing Chamber Bingo. For Chamber Bingo, every booth person gets a crayon and each visitor gets a Chamber Bingo card at the door. On the bingo cards are the names of the booths at the FAB Fair. Each time someone visits a booth they get to have the person there mark the corresponding square on their card. With one line completed the individual gets one chance at the drawing for the grand prize, with two lines completed they get two chances and if they fill all 25 spots on their card they get three chances. This idea stimulates people to go to booths they might not have ordinarily stopped by and increases traffic throughout the event. Many vendors and businesses loved participating in the program. Finally, the last decision that has been made is to keep the 'Luck of the Draw' auction going. This has been a staple for years, and is held in the cafeteria, and is something we hope to continue. There will again be a \$5 discount of booth spaces for any vendor who donates an item this year.

So with those decisions made we are looking into new additions as for this year. The committee is deciding on a variety of subjects including having a stage for entertainment or presentations, perhaps adding a blood drive component, and considering other businesses to go out and recruit. Whether we do any or all of these things though, the FAB Fair is already looking like it will be another great event this year so we urge all of you to fill out the enclosed application and send it back to us as soon as possible. We look forward to seeing you on February 21st.



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Director Match Game

Win 50% off 2009 Membership Dues

One thing that has come up through various conversations at networking events and business meetings is the fact that many members don't know who is on our Board of Directors. As a member of any organization you should be aware of those that represent you and so as a twist on just giving you facts about them, we have decided to play a game. We are willing to take 50% off your 2009 membership dues for the member who returns the game sheet below with the most accurate answers. If there is a tie we will raffle off all the winning names until we have a winner. So please take a look at the game below, feel free to cut it out, and send it back to us and take your chance at winning! Answers will be given in the next issue of The Communicator.

Please Match the Director to the Statement Using the Letters Given Beside the Director's Names

_____ This director has been both President and Secretary of the board and is still among its' officers today. With experience in working with non-profits such as the Knights of Columbus, and coming from a family where the father was a town manager for no less then four New England communities, it should not be surprising that this director enjoys being involved.

_____ Involved in many groups and leadership organizations in the town, this director, along with being a part-time minister, is the tallest in her family

_____ This director is a member of several Chambers throughout the state and provides the board with knowledge and advice picked up from other areas of the state. Although this director works throughout the state, the director still finds time to be very active with us as well as raising eight daughters.

_____ This director is our tallest and also among many other duties, finds time to teach leadership classes for individuals in the area.

_____ Being the spouse of a former director, this former postal employee also used to sell guns and ammo and now is the only male Girl Scout leader in Somerset County

_____ Known throughout the town and being a native of the area, this director was very influential this year with several projects including Bike Night, Haunted Hayrides and even the Chamber Office Clean-Up and Painting party this fall, as well as being the owner of an electrically self-supporting home.

_____ This director was born in Granby Quebec and raised in Milford Connecticut has two lovely daughters and five beautiful grandkids and she is new to the executive board.

_____ This director is a former Treasurer, which fits well with her banker lifestyle. This director has been involved with the Mid-Maine Chamber for years and was the chairperson for the Taste of Greater Waterville. Now on board, this director spends most non-banking hours working with her spouse in their expanding local business.

_____ This former President is a former member of the SEDC board and has had several individual and joint ventures in the area. At present, although he is keeping a side-business, mostly his time is spent running maintenance crews at Sugar-loaf USA, and putting in his required daily ski time, as is normal for all management/executive level employees.

_____ One of the most tenured members of the board, this director is the proud parent of one of the Junior Volunteers of the Year last year, and is the chairperson for our Community Events committee.

_____ A board member, an officer, a volunteer and an owner of a business that sends this director all over the State, most people mistakenly think the origins of this director are British.

The Directors

(alphabetically)

- A. Betty Austin
- B. Wayne Danforth
- C. Julie Goldsmith
- D. Pastor Brian Hale
- E. George Hertlein
- F. Susan Hoyt-Russell
- G. Shirley Lewis
- H. Dan Plante
- I. Brenda Washburn
- J. Russ Westcott
- K. Gary York

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Holy- Moley What an Unbelievable Stroll-y

Annual Skowhegan Event Has Great Turnout

The Holiday Stroll, an annual rite of the season for the last sixteen Decembers in Skowhegan, showed why again this year it is one of the premiere celebrations of the holiday season in the entire state. This year's event, offered much of the Stroll's customary fare, but also had some new wrinkles that added energy and excitement to the two-day extravaganza. With that delicate balance of tradition and progress, not to mention the support of many area businesses and volunteers, the Holiday Stroll had one of it's most successful runs in it's history.

One of the new developments kicked off the event on Friday December 5, with the ribbon-cutting ceremony, and open house, of the new downtown Renaissance Center. After months of hard work, both through construction and fundraising, the building of the future became a reality, and became a centerpiece of the entire weekend. In the lunchtime ceremony the pathway that leads from Commercial Street to Water Street got named after one of the town's great citizens. 'Alton's Way' was the coined name of the walkthrough, and dedicated to Alton Whittemore, one of the most devoted, well respected and influential people from an economic development standpoint that this town has seen, and Alton was on-hand to accept the honor and cut the ribbon.



Even Elvis made an appearance at the Stroll

Moving on into the evening, there was a well attended Lights to Remember service and Fiber Arts in Action display at the Library and we also got our first glimpse of Santa as he anchored the Holiday Stroll parade. This is one of the premiere events of the Stroll and hundreds came out to view the over 25 floats and walking groups that participated in good fun and good spirit. The weather was cool, but had no wind to speak of, and some in attendance said it was busiest the streets had been for this event in a number of years if ever. The parade was highlighted by everyone's favorite man in a red suit, who rode in on a fire truck to wave to the children.

Saturday brought a few surprises, and a small disappointment, but again plenty of people to downtown. The disappointment was the downtown horse-drawn hayrides that had to be cancelled due to an accident that occurred in transport the morning of. Last word as of this printing is that there were no injuries to man or animal just some structural damage to the trailer, and our thoughts go out to those involved. However, besides that the rest of the events went very well, including pictures with Santa, the Petting Zoo, the Lion's Club Talking Tree, crafts for the kids, cookie decorating, free books at the library, a midday showing of the Polar Express, a live radio remote with B98.5, roasted marshmallows, a music jam, Christmas tree sales and caroling.

The turnout for the two days was not necessarily record-breaking, but it was very healthy considering everything we hear about the national economy. Also, it is an event that the communities in this area already stand behind, and show up for, and even more than that, they look forward to it annually and it shows. It was nice to have the area swarmed with smiles and laughter, and energetic kids, wide-eyed and sensing a bit of magic in the air. Yet, even though it wasn't necessarily magical, there certainly was a holiday spirit in the air, and for those in attendance, there couldn't have been a better way to kick off the holiday season.

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Good Deeds & the Pictures to Prove It

A Pictorial Review of Community Events and Other Chamber Related Projects

Town Manager John Doucette speaking at the dedication for the Renaissance Center in downtown Skowhegan



The Rec. Center Turns Water Street into Sesame Street



Some of the other Holiday Stroll participants



The MSS Surrey was in the Holiday Stroll powered by Mike Lambke & Karen Hart



Board President Dan Plante helping scrape and paint during the Chamber Office Clean-Up Day on October 25th



Executive Director Cory King scraping windows after he had been banned from painting for "lack of craftsmanship" during the Chamber Office Clean-Up Day, Oct. 25



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