PITTENWEEM ARTS FESTIVAL

CHAIR’S REPORT

25 May 2024

Welcome everyone to the Annual General Meeting of the Pittenweem Arts Festival. It's wonderful to see so many familiar faces as well as some new ones. I’d like to extend a special welcome to Board members and trustees, our associates, our talented artists, and our supportive community members.

The purpose of today's meeting is to reflect on the past year, and outline our plans for this year and beyond. This AGM is an essential part of our commitment to transparency and community involvement.

Looking back, this year has been incredibly vibrant and successful for the Pittenweem Arts Festival. Last year we had over 100 exhibiting artists, and an impressive visitor turnout that has truly showcased the continued popularity and impact of our festival.

We also had three outstanding invited artists, Joyce Gunn Cairns, Helen Kemp and the Wemyss School of Needlework. We had an exceptional Henderson award winner in Siobhan MacLaughlin.

And of course, we showcased the best of our community artists with our Open Art Exhibition. All reviewed incredibly positively by publications such as the Courier, Scotsman and Sunday Post.

Financially, we broke even this year, and were able to provide a donation to the local football team. We also invested in the venues we use by improving the lighting in the Old Town Hall.

I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved. Our Board members, Festival staff and volunteers - and of course our artists - have poured their creativity, passion and enthusiasm into the incredibly hard work it takes to put on the Festival.

A special thank you to David and Sheila Henderson with their generous support of the award which continues to surface the most amazing talent. And special recognition and deep thanks must go to Jean Duncan and to Barbara Fleming, and to Bradley Bailey, who all stepped down at the end of last year, but without whose commitment over the many years they were involved, the festival wouldn’t exist.

I would also like to extend a special thank you to the residents of Pittenweem. We recognise that the festival week brings significant changes and challenges to our village, from increased traffic and noise to the influx of visitors. Your patience, support, and understanding are deeply appreciated, and we are committed to working with you to mitigate any negative impacts and ensure that the festival remains a positive experience for everyone.

Today we’ll provide some information on Festival plans for this year and future aspirations. I encourage everyone to engage actively in the discussions and share their valuable feedback.

Last year, over the course of the festival, we carried out some research, the first detailed research that had been done for nearly 10 years. In particular, we tried to understand our visitor experience and the experience of our artists. It’s vital that when thinking of changing such a celebrated 40-year institution we do it based on solid evidence. So, understanding the feedback is vital - as Henry Ford astutely noted, “If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person’s point of view and see things from that person’s angle as well as from your own.”

There were some interesting statistics.

* 93% of visitors would be ‘very likely’ to recommend the festival to others, with 7% being ‘likely’.
* Overwhelmingly, people know of the festival through word of mouth and most visitors are from the Fife area
* 55% come to the festival for a day out, and 49% to explore the art
* 64% purchased art, with a median spend of £70.
* A fifth of the exhibiting artists were new to the Festival.

We had some constructive feedback on our logistics and organisation, and the support we provide for artists. There were clear areas to focus on, however.

For example, although our repeat visitor rate was 79%, this meant new visitors made up only 21%. This figure is contrasted with that of 2014 where there were 38% of new visitors. In addition, the profile of our visitors stood out sharply when compared to 2014. 70% of our visitors are over 55 (32% in 2014). And, benchmarked against other similar community arts events in the UK – our age profile is significantly older.

We also received feedback on specific areas that were felt to be gaps – in particular the catering provision, and the lack of events.

As a Board, we carried out a detailed review of each part of the festival, and identified some key areas of improvement that we could implement. Some are happening this year, but some are more suited to following years when more detailed consideration and planning can take place.

So, this year, areas we are looking at include:

* Addressing the age profile of our visitor. We are challenged this year to keep our incredibly loyal regular visitors, but to try and broaden our appeal to a younger audience to have a sustainable product. This means growing our reach with our marketing, and having a selection of artists with a range of work that will have a broader appeal. This year, we feature an exciting line up of Invited Artists – with Charlie Poulson, Pauline Burbidge, David and Robert Mach and local photographer Liam Dickson. We have an amazing Henderson Bursary Award winner in Jennifer Alford, and due to the record number of applications we have recognised two runners up. We are also already planning out next year’s invitees.
* We are addressing our online presence. We decided to replace our website, providing a more interactive experience and deeper online engagement with the festival. This is supported by a new brand and a social media plan that generates more followers, and therefore, it is hoped, new visitors. The website went live two weeks ago, and we have already had fantastic feedback from our existing audiences.
* Securing venues is always a challenge for exhibiting artists, and so we carried out a focused campaign to encourage the provision of spaces. We’re delighted to say that we were successful in securing more spaces such as the Tennis Club and the Lounge Around shop and are therefore able to support more artists than ever this year – over 140 will be here this August.
* In terms of catering we are supplementing the existing provision, with some additional outlets for refreshments, based up at the Church Hall and the old Lounge About store.
* Events has been a significant focus for us, and this year we are putting on a broader range of community-focused events, with an appeal, hopefully, to the broadest age range. This will include family events such as sculpting, to music events in the early evening. In many ways this is a test to see what works best as learning for next year and beyond. The events will be focused around the Church Hall, and as a result our popular Open Art exhibition will move to 47 High Street at the heart of the village.

There are other areas we want to consider for future years, and the plans are under way. These include:

* Diversity and inclusion – as a community event it is important that we appeal to, and can support, the broadest range of artists and visitors possible.
* We are looking our Sustainability efforts. With our visitors having a high reliance on cars, we want to look at ways of encouraging public transport and the new Levenmouth line will hopefully be a way of doing this.
* We also want to really look at our core charitable objective in encouraging the arts – so investigating how we properly support more emerging artists, and different form of art.

To achieve all these initiatives, we needed a broader range of skills and capabilities on the Board, and this year after a campaign in January, we recruited 6 new Board members, mostly from the village, with key experience in areas such as digital and sustainability.

We also now have a committed person for Community Liaison, to make sure that we are better connected to the village, and we have invested in a part-time member of staff to ensure that there is a ‘linchpin’ for us, on the ground, year-round, to make sure things run smoothly.

We hope to continue to improve the festival and we thank you once again for your support.