

Thursday, September 21, 2017

To: Mayor and Council
Town of Fort Frances

From: Fort Frances Museum Advisory Committee

Subject: 2018 Town Budget - Full-time Museum Assistant

The Museum Advisory Committee would like to bring to your attention the critical need for a full-time museum assistant. At this time the Fort Frances Museum has one full-time employee.

The following problems have been identified due to insufficient staff at the Museum:

- Hundreds of items waiting to be accessioned
- No technical assistance for updates to the interactive programming
- Lack of time for scholarly research on exhibits
- Lack of time for adequate communication in all media including social media
- Uncertainty regarding on-going volunteer help, critical to operations (Over 4000 hours last year)
- Lack of manpower for mandated education component of operations
- Loss of excellent qualified people due to dependence on grants for interns. Uncertainty over being approved for interns.
- Safety issues regarding young students working alone.
- Upcoming retirement of our curator. No succession plan in place

Despite the pressures and problems caused by low staffing, there have been some successes and growth over the past five years.

- Development of a Strategic Plan
- An increase in workshops (50% funded by the Friends of the Museum)
- Interactive Programming. Electronic tablets available for patrons to enhance exhibit viewing. (made possible by a Moffat Family Fund grant)
- Three applications for interns approved.
- Meeting CMOG grant requirements with the help of the Friends and Volunteers

Respectfully submitted:

The Fort Frances Museum Advisory Committee

Debbie Ballard (Chair), Mary Hickling, Caren Fagerdahl, Nell Laur, Robert Schultz

The Museum Advisory Committee would like to bring to your attention the critical need for a full-time museum assistant.

Over the past few years the Museum has made significant forward progress in fulfilling the museum's mandate to preserve and promote our rich heritage and culture along with offering relevant programs and exhibits.

For every step forward, we take two steps back.

Progress has been made on several fronts, namely the digitization of the Fort Frances Times, the addition of electronic tablets to enhance the museum visitor experience, cataloguing of artifacts and maintaining a social media presence.

In spite of this, the museum gets further behind in the accessioning of donated items, maintaining a current and informative social media presence and the on-going newspaper digitization project.

Items have not been accessioned for over 5 years and artifacts are constantly being donated. Without items being accessioned, they are not available to the public. The accessioning project is a time consuming process requiring research and adherence to protocol. There are currently hundreds of items waiting to be added to the museums inventory.

Advancement and growth has been made with the addition of electronic tablets to enhance visitor knowledge of museum exhibits. Maintenance of material on the tablets requires on-going attention and technical assistance not available from the museum staff of one.

Each and every exhibit at the museum requires scholarly research. The current staffing level of one limits the amount that can be done. To date, most research has been done by the curator at home, during her non-working hours.

We have been very fortunate to have dedicated volunteers at the museum. Total volunteer hours over the past twelve months was in excess of 4000 hours. This is the equivalent of at least two full-time positions.

Museum programming increased with the help of the Friends of the Museum. Without the financial and organizational support of the Friends group, there would be fewer programs and workshops at the museum. The museum has a mandate to provide an educational component. CMOG funding requires that education be an integral component to the museum's operations.

Failing additional staffing, the museum cannot sustain the current level of events and programming. Nor can the museum consider community outreach (also mandated) or a commitment to organize any events at the new Rainy Lake Square.

At this time operation of the museum relies heavily upon successfully securing a grant for an intern and our dedicated volunteers. This situation is by no means permanent. At any time the application for an intern could be denied and volunteer support can end. Having a new intern every year requires a time commitment to fill out forms, apply for the grant, interview and train. The same process is required for students hired seasonally. Last year four applications were completed for staffing grants, all requiring administration hours.

This situation of constantly changing staff contributes to a lack of continuity in museum operations not to mention the loss of some excellent, qualified people.

The museum continues to fall behind in spite of intern hiring and the donation of over 4000 volunteer hours. Accessioning of artifacts has becoming a critical issue. Maintenance of social media should be on-going and a staff of one is unable to make timely updates and posts. Digital communication is becoming more and more important in the promotion of museum events and exhibits. The museum is a resource and communicating with our residents is an essential part of everyday operations.

A lack of manpower has contributed to a situation where the student employee is working alone on Saturdays. This is a responsibility above and beyond the scope of the student employee's job description. We also feel there is a safety issue. Should the student fall or encounter a belligerent patron, they would have no support.

Finally we would like to point out that the current curator has reached the age when retirement is imminent. There is no succession plan in place for a smooth transition to a new curator. A new hire would not and could not be fully informed of museum operations without having worked at the museum for some time. Even then, the learning curve has the potential to be overwhelming and museum operations would suffer as a result.

The museum has made a lot of forward progress over the past five years. This cannot continue without another museum employee.

If we are to have a vibrant, community focused museum going forward, the advisory committee feels it is imperative for the museum to have a full-time assistant.