

Shann Gowan knows the art of ...

Volunteering

Most Fascinating people | swift current |
5
SWIFT CURRENT MALL

By Gail Jansen

Tell Shann Gowan she can't do something and she'll probably prove to you she can, especially if it's something she is passionate about such as the arts.

Gowan who grew up in Swift Current moved away after graduation to attend school. Attending the University of Saskatoon, first in Commerce and then in Education, Gowan finally found her niche in the Visual Communications program offered at the Medicine Hat College.

Diploma in hand, two small children in tow, and longing to return to her home in Swift Current, Gowan first headed to Regina to work for an advertising company. Then she convinced them the work she was doing for them there could easily be done from Swift Current. After that, says Gowan, it was only logical she start her own Graphics Design business.

A long-time fan of art and music and a regular visitor and art instructor at the Swift Current Art Gallery, Gowan's association with the Gallery led to her designing promotional work and posters for them, which in turn led her to the event works she is most well-known for today.

As volunteer/creator of the Blender music series, the Stir Crazy Blues Festival, the Long Days Night Music Festival, and the annual Windscape Kite Festival, Gowan also sits on the Board of Directors of the Lyric Theatre and believes it is the passion she feels for these events and for the arts as a whole that spurs her and others on to ensuring they continue each year.

"Arts in a community means the same thing everywhere, no matter how big or small the community is," says Gowan. "You have to have it or you don't have quality of life. I think it's vital for everyone to have the arts in their life and I think that if you don't have it in a community, then you really have a boring place to live."

Far from boring herself, Gowan today lives on a farm south of the city with her husband and daughter Alex, while her two older daughters have grown and ventured forth onto artistic and volunteer-filled lives of their own elsewhere.

For Gowan, volunteering is, and has always been, a family affair.

"I was always driving to places to hear great music. I absolutely love live music," explains Gowan, who laughingly adds, "so, in that way starting up Blenders was a little self-serving, because this way I didn't have to leave my family. I could bring the music to them."

Believing it was important to share that music with her children, just as her own parents shared it with her as a way of helping them learn to appreciate and enjoy it, Gowan started enlisting her family's help in organizing each event.

"My entire family comes," says Gowan. "We all work together at it, so in that way volunteering balances with my personal life. My kid runs the popcorn machine — my husband does the sound... it keeps us all together."

To date, Gowan has been recognized twice for her work by the Saskatchewan Tourism Award of Excellence in Promotions and Marketing — once for her work with the Stir Crazy Blues Festival and once for her work with the Windscape Kite Festival. She has also been honoured with a Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal presented by then Governor General, Lynda Haverstock.

With typical modesty Gowan says of her awards, "They are very nice, and a great honour to receive. It's always nice to have somebody look at your work and say you did a good job. Marketing and promotions is what I do and I guess I didn't really realize that we were doing as good a job

"I believe this program is important because it showcases the very best in who we are as a community and no matter what our backgrounds are we all play a part in making this a great place to live."

— Mayor Sandy Larson, City of Swift Current



as we were."

But awards and accolades aren't what motivates Gowan. Instead, it is the work itself.

"You get as much out of volunteering as you give," explains Gowan. "It's a great thing to do and I can't imagine not being a volunteer; it's so much fun."

It also, says Gowan, is a great way to get yourself out into the community especially if you are new.

"Being a volunteer automatically makes you a part of the 'in' crowd and helps you make friends that automatically let you in and accept you. You can volunteer for a whole event or just for an hour. You can make it whatever you want and really, you'll find that if you volunteer you'll want to be there and you'll find the time to make it work because it's something that becomes important in your life."

The only words of caution Gowan has for future volunteers is this: "Don't volunteer for something you're not into. Find the things that you are passionate about. It's more fun that way and if you have fun you'll make the time to do it. Go to the things you love and ask if you can help. It would be frightening if they said 'no'."

For Gowan, that obvious passion is in music and the arts, with an impressive 1,800 records in her music collection and more than 14,000 songs downloaded on her i-pod, music is as much a part of who Gowan is, as is the volunteering she does to make sure live music can continue to be a part of the city she loves

"We will live here (until) we die," says Gowan. "We own a beautiful farm here and we're never leaving it. I love driving into my valley and I love swimming all summer long in my swimming hole. I love Swift Current. It has a lot to offer. It is a great place to raise your kids, and a great place to live. I've lived other places, and I'm glad to be back."

"Arts in a community means the same thing everywhere, no matter how big or small the community is. You have to have it or you don't have a quality of life. I think it's vital for everyone to have the arts in their life."

□ Shann Gowan



To watch the video presentation of this week's Fascinating Person tune into Southwest TV News Monday at 6:30 p.m. on SCN.