

Arts & Culture Wall of Fame – 2012 Inductees

Gerda Amoraal

Gerda was born in Den Haag, Netherlands in 1932. She moved to Toronto in 1953 and then to Niagara Falls in 1973. After many years of knitting and sewing for her children, she began studying the Fibre Arts.

Gerda learned to weave in the 70's and by the 80's she had studied spinning, garment design for woven fabrics, weaving techniques, dying, needlepoint tapestry, and quilting. Gerda took a very extensive master spinners course and received her certificate. At that time, her special area of interest was in angora. She raised her own angora rabbits and became an authority on the subject.

She soon began sharing her expertise with others by teaching at Peterson Community Workshop, E.L. Crossley High School and Niagara District High School.

Gerda also volunteered and held numerous executive positions with the Niagara Handweavers and Spinners, Niagara Guild of Crafts, Rainbow Quilters and the Buffalo Weavers Guild.

Gerda's works have received acclaim both locally and internationally. She is a multiple recipient of awards at juried shows in Ontario, she has been published in Spin Off Magazine, the Home Spun Hand Knit Book in the United States as well as other publications. Gerda had her works selected for exhibition in the Niagara Falls Museum and "The Design Store" by the Ontario College of Art while she was a part time student at the college.

After working in the Fibre Arts for many years, Gerda is still active in spinning and weaving and can be found sharing her many talents with young and old in the community.

Kris Collver

Kris was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1981 and was raised in Niagara Falls. Known as "The KaC Himself", Kris is "all about the music". Six years ago, he "got the itch" for hip hop from a friend who recorded his own CDs. He started dabbling with lyrics and developed his own style.

Kris has recorded 16 albums in six years and plays nearly one hundred shows a year. KaC is a huge supporter of giving back to the community. He donates 100% of the proceeds from his performances and merchandise to a number of different charities. He supports the Boys & Girls Club of Niagara, Sick Kids Hospital, Digestive Cancer Research, Breast Cancer Foundation, The Kidney Foundation, The Rankin Cancer Run, DJs Holiday Hope Benefit, and Prostate Cancer Research.

Kris's community involvement goes beyond music. In 2012, he and a friend decided to help clean up the City and adopted a street as the "Eco-Ninjas" and they clean up litter along their adopted street regularly.

His fast-paced raps, infectious personality, and high energy on stage are what make him such an incredible entertainer. KaC aims to bring a different style of hip-hop music, by telling a fast pace list of stories, memories, and life long experiences. "The KaC Himself" gets people out of their seats and brings the fun back to hip hop.

The song "Rock, Paper, Life" was featured in the film "RSP: The Way of the Tossler" and the video for the song even picked up a Niagara Music Award in 2009 for Music Video of the Year. KaC was nominated in 2009, 2010, and 2011 at the Niagara Music Awards for Best Hip Hop Artist. In 2010, Kris was successful in winning the best Hip Hop Artist and Entertainer of the Year awards. His work and dedication for making music has not gone unrecognized.

Robert J. Foley

Robert J. Foley was born in Niagara Falls in 1941. He is a writer, publisher and historian.

He wrote weekly history features for the Niagara Falls Review, Welland Tribune and the St. Catharines Standard on the history of the Niagara Peninsula and the history of Canada. The features were published in six books: Niagara Story Volume I, Beginnings to 1812; Volume II, The War of 1812; Volume III, The Welland Canal; Volume IV, The Canadians; Canada's Story, Book One, The Dawn of Time; and Book two, The Struggle for a Continent.

He was the Executive Director of the Chippawa Battlefield Preservation Society. The society was instrumental in saving the Chippawa Battlefield, which became a heritage site owned by the Niagara Parks Commission.

Bob is the Executive Director of Heritage Niagara, an organization that facilitates heritage projects in the Niagara Region. Heritage Niagara helped facilitate a coalition of veterans' organizations to ensure the preservation of the Niagara Falls Armoury. The organization also sponsors several awards for outstanding service to the heritage community including the George and Olive Seibel Award and the Esther Summers Award of Excellence. The Esther Summers Award is given to an elementary school student who has participated in the annual Heritage Fair run by the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) and the Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB).

He was a founding member of the Historic Niagara Education Committee that brought the DSBN and NCDSB together to successfully launch the Passport Niagara Project that will allow 30,000 elementary school students to celebrate the bicentennial of the War of 1812.

Maria Klokou

Maria Klokou was born in 1953 in Kent, England and immigrated to Niagara Falls in 1992, with her daughter Sarah. A self taught artist she promptly immersed herself into the Canadian art world and soon became a well known and respected member of the Niagara Falls community.

Shortly after moving to Niagara, Maria opened an art gallery on Queen Street in downtown Niagara Falls and became a founding member of the Parkway Artists Guild. She participated in countless art shows throughout Ontario and created a hugely popular series of hand coloured prints of Niagara. In 1993, she opened and ran a gallery in St. Catharines before returning to Niagara Falls in 1994 and establishing a gallery, studio and art school on Lundy's Lane. Over the course of her twenty years in Niagara, Maria strived to give back to the community. She used her artistic talents to support numerous causes, most notably breast cancer and the Juravinski Cancer Centre.

In 2000, Maria was diagnosed with breast cancer. For the following twelve years, she endured numerous cancer treatments, travelling weekly to the Juravinski Cancer Centre in Hamilton. Throughout her battle with cancer she remained positive, strong and full of hope for the future. She began teaching art full time to over 40 students and she threw herself into more community fundraising with a new passion for breast cancer causes. Her art classes were as much "therapy" sessions for teacher and student as they were educational classes. All of her students learned much about art, as well as taking away a contagious spirit for life that Maria radiated.

On July 14, 2012 Maria lost her twelve year battle with cancer. She remained positive until the very end and left a legacy of beautiful artistic creations and inspiration. Her legacy will live on through the "Maria Klokou Memorial Fund", which has been established in her memory.

Pasquale Ramunno

Pasquale was born in Pacentro, Italy in 1937, where he developed an interest in the arts at a very early age. At 7 years of age under the tutelage of Giuseppe Avolio, who was a well known artist in the Region of Abruzzi, Pasquale was able to develop his skills in clay sculpting. In addition to art, he was also studying music and learned to play several instruments. In 1956, at the age of 18, with 2 musical instruments in hand, Pasquale arrived in Canada, settled in Niagara Falls and soon after found employment as a commercial painter.

For 25 years, he worked as a painter at the Greater Niagara General Hospital. On weekends as band leader of San Remo, he would find work performing accordion at various functions throughout Southern Ontario and Western New York. While working at the GNGH, he painted several murals in the Children's Ward and Physiotherapy Department. Some of his work displayed throughout the Region includes the bust of Dr. Davidson at GNGH, a statue of Laura Secord at Laura Secord Apartments on Valleyway, life-size statues of a Roman soldier at Casa D'oro Restaurant on Victoria Avenue, and Sir William Lyon Mackenzie at the Mackenzie Printery and Newspaper Museum in Queenston.

Pasquale founded the Rock Legends Wax Museum on Centre Street in 1997. Since opening the museum, Pasquale has sculpted over 70 life-size wax figures of famous musicians. In addition to housing his waxworks, his artwork also extends to the exterior of the building where 15 bas-relief sculptures can be viewed. His work has been recognized in several media outlets, including a feature story in Niagara Life Magazine, and incorporated in a Much Music Video Awards broadcast.

With 65 years of dedication to the arts, and his commitment to detail, Pasquale continues to create exemplary works for the museum and still takes part in the occasional weekend musical performance.

William (Bill) Smeaton

Bill was born in Toronto in 1943, and came to Niagara Falls at a young age. He graduated from Stamford Collegiate and continued his college education in Buffalo.

Bill was always interested in the Performing Arts. He was a boy soprano soloist singing with the Optimist Club Boys Choir and St. Martin's Anglican Church Choir. He studied with some of the finest male choristers when he was invited to attend Camp Wal-i-ro in Ohio.

He had many successes as boy soprano and a young baritone, winning many Kiwanis Music Festivals trophies and scholarships to study under former Metropolitan Opera singer, Vincent Matina in Buffalo, New York. This led him to a love of acting and performing with the Niagara Falls Music Theater and many other venues through the 60's and 70's.

Bill was a guest soloist for many concert bands in the Niagara Region, including the Fred Willett Concert Band where he performed during Summers at Queenston Heights, the Jimmy Miranda Band with Bob Wybrow conducting and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Band.

Bill was elected as the Mayor of Niagara Falls in 1984 and became an advocate for the Arts. He was concerned that there was only a Recreation Commission to promote and honour athletes in the city and decided to establish through City Council an "Arts & Culture Commission" for those who deserved recognition in the field of the Arts. His efforts led to many meetings with various Arts & Culture advocates from Niagara Falls and ultimately achieved his goal.

He was the first recipient of the "Barbara Frum Award" for the promotion of arts and culture in this city. Bill continues to support and promote arts and culture throughout all of Niagara both politically and personally.

John Warden

John Warden was born in 1939 and raised in Niagara Falls, Canada. John began sewing when he was just ten years old. His evident talent won him two scholarships. He attended Parsons School of Design in New York and graduated with top honours in 1963.

After graduating, John moved to Montreal to begin his career as the designer for a well known clothing manufacturer. Soon after, he launched his first collection and it was very well received. His unique style combined the colours white, black and cream with modern and timeless lines. His second collection brought him great recognition and soon reached the fashion elite across Canada.

The first John Warden Boutique was opened in 1966 where his clientele included Margaret Trudeau, Ivana Trump, Mariette Levesque and many other celebrities. He created a pilot collection for Le Chateau. His collections ranged from men's, woman's and children's clothing.

From 1968 to 1980, John worked in association with Canadian manufacturers and his clothes were distributed all over the world. In 1967, he designed the uniforms for Expo 67. In 1976, John along with other designers created the uniform for the Olympic Games in Montreal.

Throughout his career John won several awards; in 1964 the Canadian Cotton Council award, in 1978 Designer of the World which he shared with Yves Saint Laurent, and in 1983 the Canadian Designer of the Year. The same year he was honored by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Queen Elizabeth II and received the Fashion Award for Achievement.

He lost his battle with cancer on June 29, 2007 in Montreal, Quebec surrounded by his family. John will be remembered as a Canadian fashion icon.