

August 10, 2011

Mr. Skip Triplett, Chair,
BC Gaming Review,
P.O. Box 9827, Stn Prov Gov't,
Vicotira, BC
V8W 9W4

Dear Mr. Triplett:

Re: Harrison Festival Society, Harrison Hot Springs, BC

As a professional arts organization, the Harrison Festival Society is no longer eligible under the current criteria to receive gaming funding. As an integral part of community life in the Fraser Valley region, Harrison Hot Springs and the District of Kent, the organization also does not qualify as a “community event” although most activities are free to the general public. The Society has been delivering year round cultural programming as well as the summer festival for 33 years, and is now facing extinction.

History:

The Harrison Festival has been receiving gaming funding to carry out its programs since **1989**. The current three year agreements expire on March 31, 2012. The Society received \$70,000 annually through a bingo affiliation grant and an additional \$10,500 from Direct Access to assist with marketing. Since 1989, the organization fulfilled volunteer requirements at the Chilliwack Bingo Hall which was managed by the Chilliwack Bingo Association. The Society's Executive Director currently serves on its board of directors.

The Association and the Harrison Festival were very active in successfully lobbying Chilliwack Municipal Council to approve the inclusion of slot machines in a new facility. It is disappointing to do this work for both the municipal and provincial governments, who will benefit from revenue, when many of the organizations who supported this initiative will now not receive gaming funding.

Background:

The Harrison Festival Society has presented the ten-day Harrison Festival in Harrison Hot Springs for the last 33 years. It is regarded as a world class event that takes place in a small rural community (pop. 1500) rather than in a large urban centre.

The festival takes place along the front street in Harrison and features visual, literary, and performing arts that reflect the diversity of the Canadian landscape. Partnerships have been established with local First Nations which are featured at the event each year. A special day for Children also takes place mid-week of the event. The festival is highly accessible to families of the local region as most events are **free** to the general public.

The organization also presents 10-12 concerts and theatre events during the year and has established a solid audience base from the Fraser Valley.

The Society has developed many community partnerships over the years and enjoys support from local businesses and many other community groups. The University of the Fraser Valley has also been a partner since the festival's inception. The municipalities of Kent and Harrison Hot Springs support the event financially. As well as earned revenue, funding is provided by the federal department of Canadian Heritage, Service Canada, and the provincial BC Arts Council.

The community has taken ownership of the event and almost 200 volunteers from the local area (pop. 6500) support the organization and its programs. Attendance at the summer event is approximately 18,000.

The organization is well respected by its peers across the country. It has received many awards for its work. The Executive Director received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of the Fraser Valley in 2006 for her work with the institution (board chair) as well as the positive impact of the Harrison Festival on the Fraser Valley.

The organization has become an integral part of the community and is regarded as a good community citizen, assisting other groups and serving on various committees.

Impact:

The loss of the Harrison Festival will have a significant impact on the Fraser Valley and particularly the communities of Harrison Hot Springs and the District of Kent. It is the only organization presenting and delivering professional quality cultural programs. A healthy community is one that is enriched by participating in cultural presentations, and the loss of the organization will create a huge gap in community life.

The non-existence of the organization will also:

- eliminate three full time and twelve part-time jobs in the local community
- create a negative effect on the local economy; impact of the summer event estimated at 1.3 million (Hills Strategies – Toronto)
- eliminate a world class event that generates a positive tourist experience in the destination resort of Harrison Hot Springs
- eliminate the established cultural identity of the Village of Harrison Hot Springs (Cultural Scan – municipalities of Harrison Hot Springs and District of Kent – pub. 2008)

Recommendations:

- 1. Reinstate eligibility criteria**
The present criteria do not make sense. For example, why is a Cowboy Festival eligible and a mainly free cultural event like the Harrison Festival is not?

- 2. Restore gaming funding to 2008/09 levels to arts organizations ensuring that the Harrison Festival Society can continue the delivery of cultural programs in the local area**
In recent years, the province's gaming revenue has increased by 300% yet funding to many organizations has been decreased or eliminated. The spirit of the 1999 Memorandum of Agreement should be revisited.

- 3. Provide multi-year funding to insure certainty and sustainability**
Sound accountability measures are already in place. Many organizations like the Harrison Festival Society have excellent track records.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours truly,

Phyllis Stenson,
Executive Director
On behalf of the Board of Directors