

No wolf will blow down this straw house

By Rachel Psutka

Prince Edward County has long been a Mecca to emerging artists and artisans, but few come prepared to build their own sustainable-living studios out of straw bales.

That's just what owners of Owl Farm Studios, Janna Burford and Jon Hiscock, did in 2009, creating an artist's paradise using straw bales as insulation in a brand new structure on Victoria Road.

The straw bales, purchased from a farmer near Big Island, are just one part of the locally produced property that the artists have created near Carrying Place.

"The straw bale thing happened because we wanted to do something eco-friendly, and while new buildings never are completely eco-friendly, we still wanted to do this," explained Burford.

The young couple, who have been together since high school, started off by building a straw bale studio, which housed them for the first winter in the county. They then moved on to building a straw bale house the following summer, with timber structural support.

"This building took two years to put together, but we weren't working on it full-time," said Burford. "You can only really build with these materials in the spring. The plaster needs to dry, and if you do it in the in winter, it freezes. You have to do it in warm weather."

The straw, while being local and eco-friendly, is also a heat efficient way of insulating a house.

"The walls are 18 inches thick," said Hiscock. "They retain a lot of thermal mass. It's cool in the summer and warm in the winter. There's the esthetic reason too."

"I think it's beautiful," said Burford.

The straw is not structural to the artists' home, serving mostly an esthetic and insulating purpose.

"If the walls got knocked out, this place isn't going to fall down. It's supported by wood. If it's not done properly, the bales will rot, just like wood. So we have a really large overhang, and that helps protect the wall against rain," said Burford.

Burford, a potter, and Hiscock, an acrylic painter and framer, started the plans for the structure while living in Toronto. Burford had long been coming to Prince Edward County with her fam-



Photo by Rachel Psutka

Janna Burford and Jon Hiscock are the owners of Owl Farm Studios near Carrying Place, Ont. Seen here on Thursday, Feb. 2, Hiscock and Burford built their studio and home using straw bale walls to create an eco-friendly, local-product building.

ily to stay at a cottage in Wellington, and the draw was natural when the couple decided to set up their studios.

"We were familiar with the area," said Hiscock. "We would come up here on weekends with friends."

"There's a good artist community up here," said Burford. "We were both comfortable with being here. We wanted to leave the city."

This year, the artists are continuing their straw bale enterprise with the completion of a guest suite, aptly named the Owl's Nest, which they hope to open this summer. The suite will allow guests to take in the county from an eco-friendly view, according to Burford, as well as hopefully bringing business to their studio.

"We wanted to share what we've built

with other people. We enjoy it so much that it's nice to enjoy it with others as well. A lot of people don't have the opportunity to live or stay in a straw bale place," said Burford.

"It's good to expose people to the natural building, and everyone is always blown away by it," said Hiscock.

The couple has already started plans to have an organic garden and is hoping to

have chickens on the property in the future, all part of their plan to draw tourists to the property.

"We're not in the main area down in the county, so it's harder to get people to come up here to the studio. We've been on the Arts Trail and the Studio Tour. I know it takes a while to build business. People don't really know about us yet, it'll just take time," said Burford.

Performers at National Circus School undergo intense training and challenges

School celebrates 30th anniversary at Montreal location

By Melissa Di Nardo

Cirque du Soleil is what motivated Calin Stevenson to run away and join the circus – more specifically, the National Circus School (NCS).

This year the school is celebrating its 30th anniversary. It was founded in 1982 and since then it has changed locations three times. Cirque du Soleil was founded in 1985, three years after NCS was opened.

Aerial silk artist, Stevenson, 21, moved from Pickering to Montreal to attend NCS and is currently trying to join Cirque du Soleil.

"It's everyone's dream to be in Cirque du Soleil. It is what's most known here in Canada," said Stevenson.

Aerial silk performers climb a special suspended fabric which is suspended from the ceiling and rely solely on skill as there are no safety lines.

"I didn't know what I was getting myself into. It really is challenging in a much different way than gymnastics," said Stevenson.

All artists at NCS undergo a daily intense upper core exercise routine, before attending a specific two-hour discipline training geared towards each artist's major.

"You need to be able to put a story together technically and have a movement that is all your own. No two artists look the same," said Stevenson.

Originally, Stevenson was accepted into NCS for acrobatics. However, Stevenson realized early on that it was not for him, he went through a discovery journey and fell in love with aerial silk.

"I didn't know I had this dream when I started, but I look back at what I have accomplished and what I have done and I really couldn't picture myself doing anything else," said Stevenson after a session of aerial silk training with his artistic counselor.

"I have always been told that when I do things there is a gracefulness to it. So I really feel that tissue (aerial silk) incorporates all that. It gives me a really good way to show it, so that's why I choose it."

The NCS's PR representative Laurence Cardin says the area where the school is located in Montreal is known as "city du cirque" because many circus companies

are in close proximity.

NCS has four programs starting from elementary school all the way to college.

"The school's final program teaches circus arts. Students can become trained to become instructors for higher educa-

tion programs or to start a recreational program in their neighborhoods," said Cardin.

"The programs offered here are for kids who don't see themselves in a regular high school, sitting on a chair for eight



Photo by Melissa Di Nardo

Calin Stevenson is a graduating student from the Nation Circus School in Montreal. He is practicing his major Aerial Silk for his 7 minute graduating performance piece. The National Circus School success rate is 95% graduate with graduates receiving a placement with in three months.

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gymnastics coach Karla Sage

hours," said Cardin.

"The high school program is designed for hyperactive children, and prepares them for the college program."

Cardin said the school isn't known outside of Quebec because circus is new to Canada.

"It is a little bit different in Quebec because we have the circus companies, but then in the rest of Canada they don't have a lot of companies. Well actually there are almost none," said Cardin. Students in the school's college program work with coaches and artistic counselors for three years. Which can explain why the placement rate is very high after graduating from NCS.

"We are talking about more than 95 per cent (of the students get a job) within a couple of months. It is really an art that is in high demand," explained Cardin.

"Cirque du Soleil employs about 1,500 artists; and then we have Cirque Éloize's and The Seven Fingers (Les 7 Doigts de la Main), they recruit a lot of our graduating students," said Cardin.

iKarla Sage, Quinte's Regional power tumbling coach, said "There needs to be more promotion in cities that these are high level athletes."

Sage is the only coach in the Quinte region for tumbling and has been coaching for ten years. Currently she is training an athlete who is applying to get an audition for Cirque du Soleil.

"The circus is a great opportunity for athletes to travel and see the world and to try different things before they settle down," said Sage.

"A lot of people don't know that going into the circus consists of acrobatics and all of hard training that goes behind the scenes. Most people relate the circus to clowns, animals and that kind of thing," said Sage.

Music Festival deadline approaches for interested students

By Manuela Garay-Giraldo

The Quinte Rotary Music Festival has celebrated musical talent for 44 years.

The deadline to apply for this year's festival is quickly approaching. Feb. 13 is the final day for interested students to apply.

This year, adjudicators will be doing workshops with students in their different categories.

"The workshops are really good for students," said John Chisholm, chair of the festival. "They have the opportunity to get really constructive feedback and our adjudicators are really good. They make the students feel inspired and motivated."

The festival, which was started 44 years ago by the Belleville Rotary Club, is now a collaboration between the three Rotary clubs in the Quinte region.

"To have the Trenton and the Quinte Sunrise Rotaries involved in this project is very special," said Chisholm. "The whole point of having a Rotary is to help others, and here we are helping each other in order to celebrate the amazing talent we have in this region."

The festival is open to all music students and this year applications can be done online.

"Technology has helped a lot," said Chisholm. "It just makes things easier to keep organized. And it's very user-friendly. Teachers can log on and check if any of their students have applied and students can apply directly online."

The prizes that are up for grabs include several \$500 cash prizes as well as a \$2,500 scholarship award.

"It is important for us to nourish talent because, historically speaking, it's the people who got this kind of experience who go on and become the leaders of our community," said Chisholm.

"We have amazing talent in this region, and we need to celebrate it and continue to encourage young people to hone their skills, to get the training they need to get to great places."

The festival will take place from April 16 to 20, with the award ceremony on May 2. The registration fees are \$20 for individuals and \$35 for groups, except for the "piano master class" category, which is \$45. To view the festival's syllabus, which includes all rules and regulations, categories as well as the application, see website www.quinterotarymusicfestival.com.