



Photo by Dayna Lefebvre

Ruth Forget sits with Silas, the theraputic bunny that helps children overcome grief at the Edith Fox Life and Loss Centre in Picton. Silas becomes a tool to help the children express their feelings. "Often they might not talk about their own story," Forget explains. "But when they're holding the bunny they will say something."

Bunnies help children to grieve

By Dayna Lefebvre

In a quiet little cottage along the shoreline in Prince Edward County, a very special bunny named Silas helps children overcome their grief after a significant loss.

The cottage, which is home to the Edith Fox Life and Loss Centre, housed generations of pigs before Kathleen Foster-Morgan, the founder of the program, acquired the property and transformed it into a snug studio environment.

"Everybody likes it, no matter what age," Foster-Morgan says with a smile. "It doesn't look like a pig house now."

The program runs for eight weeks and offers clinical grief therapy for children and teenagers to share their emotions and experiences with grief. It focuses on creativity, physical activities and building an animal-human bond to encourage healing after a loss. The children do scavenger hunts, arts and crafts and other activities.

"It gives them an opportunity to tell their feelings when they can't use words," Foster-Morgan explains. "Some people can talk about their grief story, but a lot of people find it hard to get started."

After the program, the children have learned how to express themselves creatively as a means of coping with their

emotions, or simply enjoyment.

Ruth Forget, a Loyalist alumni who began working at the centre for her placement in college, says it's rewarding to watch the children grow.

"When they come they are often very quiet and shy, feeling like they are the only ones in this situation," she says. "By the end ... there has been a transformation. You can see it in the way they talk, the relationships they've formed."

The centre, which has always used dogs and sheep for therapy, began to use bunnies when Forget brought her pets into the program. Silas is now an important part of the healing process.

"The bunnies were really a perfect size," says Foster-Morgan. "We wrap them up in blanket. There is a cuddle factor with the bunnies."

Foster-Morgan and Forget say the bunnies provide a way for the children to express their feelings and needs without directly telling the adults. Silas becomes a tool for expressing the children's need for intimacy and closeness.

"It's a way for them to start getting their story out," Forget says. "They might not talk about their own story, but they will say that Silas had a bad night."

"They move from saying Silas had a bad night, to they had a bad night, and

they can talk about it."

Silas is currently the only bunny active in the program. The second bunny, Hillary, passed away in December after working in the centre since 2009.

"That was a big group issue, when she didn't come back to the next session," Foster-Morgan explains. "Ruth shared her sadness with the group. It was a gift for those boys to see her tenderness and emotion, to validate what was going on in their own lives. It was very real and very honest."

Forget has a second bunny that is currently being worked with for the centre, which will reopen once the weather warms up.

Quinte Ballet School has '50s theme for fundraiser

By Sam Quinn

This weekend will be an opportunity to get into a 50's mood, put on a dress and a hat and have fun.

For the Quinte Ballet School of Canada, this is the time of year for fundraising. On Jan. 25, the QBSC will be holding a fundraising event at the Greek Hall in Belleville.

In contrast to many of their other performances, the QBSC has put on such as their 40th anniversary celebration, the Frosty Fiddle Frolics and The Nutcracker, they are turning to a more mature spin on their routine for this year's theme, Mad Men.

"It was an interesting process choosing the theme because even though I grew up in that time frame,

and I listened to it a lot in the daytime with my parents, I was a bit lost. I googled music from that age and it came up with a lot of Frank Sinatra," said Catherine Taylor, artistic director at the QBSC.

"Then I saw Peggy Lee singing *Boy from Ipanema*, from the original Frank Sinatra version. Having to incorporate our male student into the dance, it was so appropriate."

For \$125, members of the community can attend the Mad Men Gala and enjoy dancing, Frank Sinatra music, dinner and cocktails from 6pm until midnight.

"The Frosty Fiddle Frolic's was more of a fun Irish step dancing, but what we are working on is much different. This dance tells a story," said Marilyn Lawrie, executive director at the QBSC.

"Although it is not a comedic performance, it definitely puts a smile on your face."

At last year's fundraising event, The Frosty Fiddle Frolics, the school was able to raise \$4000, which they are hoping to reach again this year to raise money for the academy as well as their student bursaries and scholarships.

"Ballet is not as popular as many other things so we don't draw in as much of a crowd and can't generate enough money. Many of our students have a dream to study dance, and like all of us, they come from regular families and it is difficult to pursue," said Taylor.

Despite the money the school is hoping to raise, a lot of it will have to be put towards finances to pay for the Greek Hall, dinner and drinks and the silent

auction, which is why much of the advertising has been produced in-house to save as much money as possible.

Like many non-profit organizations, the QBSC has to raise so much money to keep the organization running, which is possible due to the private funding they receive from the community's generous donations.

"We receive donations anywhere from \$50 to \$1000. It takes my breath away how many wonderful people there are. We always send thank you notes individually," said Lawrie.

To find out more about the Quinte Ballet School and its fundraising gala, go to: <http://www.quintenevents.ca/?p=33582>

Women's clothing shop at Bayview Mall closes its doors

After 37 years of business owner decides to call retire from La Belle Femme

By James Wood

Thirty-seven years of history are coming to a close at the Bay View Mall this coming Friday, as women's clothing shop La Belle Femme shuts its doors for the last time.

A longtime business at the shopping centre, the shop is being closed as its owner, Rita MacDermaid, wishes to have some time to relax.

Established on Jan. 24, 1977, the shop has been MacDermaid's distraction from her day job for the past 37 years. A former nurse in the maternity ward at Belleville General Hospital, she had founded the store to give something to move on to after her planned exit from nursing, a job with regular hours.

A store location in the Belleville Plaza, now called the Bay View Mall, was a choice she never regretted.

"It's just the right size for a boutique like I have," said MacDermaid.

La Belle Femme is a small women's clothing store with a big footprint. Even on the final days of business, a



Photo by James Wood

Rita MacDermaid is framed by a signpost outside her shop, La Belle Femme, in the Bayview Mall.

customers were frequently browsing through the racks.

"I've got loyal customers from 1977 till now," said MacDermaid. "Everybody is very upset that I'm closing."

Passersby couldn't help but notice the signs placed outside the store, pointing towards the final sales.

MacDermaid hopes that her retirement will give her and her husband more time to see the world and their relatives.

"I want to enjoy travelling, and family and friends," she said.

Her preferred destinations would be British Columbia, eventually making it to the Greek Islands, a goal she and her husband have had for many years.

Although the closing is bittersweet, it is final. The location will be stripped out, and space put up for sale.

"I'm not selling it, I'm closing it," said MacDermaid.

With good foot traffic, the space could host a new store. La Belle Femme, however, will be gone for good.

"I'm retiring, and that's what's going to happen unless you want to buy it."

The store will be closed by the end of this month.