

Spiritual healer shares his skills

By Andrew Lahodynskyj

The smell of sage, sweet grass, tobacco and cedar fills the bear's den of Blue-Star Bear, or Vaughan Rightmyer in English. The room is full of native artifacts – a bear pelt on the wall, feathers, stones and other little trinkets cover an alter-like table. Rightmyer is conducting a traditional healing ceremony. He is a shaman, which is a spiritual healer.

"The bear's den is a place where people get a chance to rest and be re-awaken," said Rightmyer.

Ever since he was a very young boy, Rightmyer knew that being a shaman was his calling in life.

"Grandmother Willow asked me at the age of four, 'would you like to be a shaman?' he recounted. "I told her yes, and that I wanted to help mankind."

Becoming a shaman helped Rightmyer to learn and following his native traditions. He was taught to live the life that he wanted, and never to hide his identity.

He learned the art of healing through his grandmother. She taught him about plants, medicine and how to help people. She also gave him another important message. "Listen to your dreams, because they are your teachers."

There is something very peaceful and calming about a traditional healing ritual. It starts with a smudging of sage, sweet grass, tobacco and cedar, the four sacred medicines.

"When they smudge they go to their heart, 'May I have a good heart,' to their mouth, 'May I speak good words,' to their ears, 'May I hear good things,' to their eyes, 'May I see well,' and may I have a good mind and may my body be pure," explained Rightmyer.

He doesn't always know exactly what is wrong with a client.

"Sometimes they don't know what's wrong, and sometimes I don't know the answer, until the stones go on that person's seven spots of their body," he said. "That tells me which part of their body needs help."

"When they come in and lay down, they have to open themselves to the universe. If they don't, it's not going to work. They have to believe in them-



Photo by Andrew Lahodynskyj

Vaughan Rightmyer visits one of his many prayer spots in Zwick's Park in Belleville, Ont. As a native shaman, or spiritual healer, he brings his clients to this location to relax and strengthen bonds with mother earth. This is also the location where he put his daughter's and grandmother's ashes.

selves, because it's them doing all the work. So when you are laying those stones and you re-awaken them, ... they send out heat and they send out unconditional love."

Rightmyer then starts singing an ancient chant to begin the healing process. He beats away on a leather hide drum that he built himself. The sounds and smells are hypnotic.

He said he hopes to one day be able to build his family a log cabin in the

woods where they can live off the land.

"I would feel more grounded and peaceful," he said, referring to his dream life. He plans on growing a garden, raising some goats, creating clothing for he and his partner and even making toys for his son. He hopes that this lifestyle will make his connection with mother earth stronger, and make him feel more comfortable.

Trying to live a traditional lifestyle in a modern world has been difficult,

but Rightmyer said he has found a way to balance the best of both worlds.

"Just finding people to have as a support system, that's what keeps me balanced." He said he believes that if he didn't have this support system, he would have lost all of his traditional values and knowledge. Becoming a shaman has taught him many lessons, but the most important is to love yourself and to live life to the fullest.

"Don't let people stop you from

making your dreams come true. Just be yourself and enjoy every moment," he said.

Or, like his friends from the west coast usually say to him, "It's a good day to die. Doesn't mean you have to die, it means everyday is a good day no matter what. You live life to the fullest, you be yourself."

For a video on the shaman, go to: <http://www.qnetnews.ca/?p=47396>

Joyfull Noise group shares its love for singing

By Kayleen Preston

Be there or be square for an evening full of laughter, dance and song Tuesday evenings at Belleville's Core centre.

Women of all ages come together to sing songs mainly from the '50s and '60s, and occasionally from the '70s. It does not matter if you have sang professionally before. All that matters is that you like to sing.

Joyfull Noise has groups in Belleville, Kingston, Cobourg and Toronto. The Belleville and Cobourg groups began in September 2013, while Kingston and Toronto have only started up recently.

"The neat thing about our group is that all of our choirs learn the same repertoire. So, for instance, if we have

a gig here in Belleville, it's open to the Cobourg women to come and sing with us too. And we do that quite often," explained Anne Reid who is the manager of the Belleville club.

The Belleville group is composed of approximately 55 women, and anywhere from 20-55 women show up each week. The members who are unable to attend one evening can still practise using a music track on the computer they have been given. Local musicians Tim Campbell and Brittany Brant with Cheryl Thrasher, who is the main director as well as the director for the Belleville group, produce the tracks. Reid described their partnership as "magic".

The group uses the tracks to create four-part harmonies to recreate the well-

known songs.

The Belleville group has mastered approximately 20 songs to perform at events including, *Happy Together* by The Turtles, *Twist and Shout* by the Beatles, and *California Dreaming* by the Mamas and the Papas. Recently they've begun to learn *Build me up Buttercup* by The Foundations.

"A lot of our concerts have been for charity events," says Shaena Dearman, director of the Kingston group, who was filling in for Thrasher who was ill on Tuesday evening. "We also go and travel to the local nursing homes and senior residents to entertain them. In the evenings, we'll take some of our practices there. We always have a year-end concert as well, where we pick some benefit we want to

support, and bring our friends and family, and anyone who wants to come listen to us, to put on a performance for them."

The women enjoy boogying to the music as their enthusiasm radiates through them and to anyone who is listening. Some people are moved by their music so much that they become emotional.

"We've had people come up to us after performances and start to cry because it brought back a memory of when they were 16 and sitting with their sweetheart. So you never know what you evoke with music," Reid reminisced.

"I just think music is wonderful for all kinds of reasons, and that being one of them. It's something happy that we do, and boy, we need that now in this world."

Comedian...

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"When I first started standup, I moved to Toronto, and spent almost five years touring all over Ontario, playing all these nice big theatres now. I still think of all those old pubs where they used to have comedy nights, you know, chicken wings and comedy."

Asked what is next for him, Butt replies, "My production company, Sparrow Media, is transitioning right now. It's kind of an exciting time. Traditionally, we've just done stuff that I've written and now we're opening the doors to working with other creative people to produce -- we're trying to get in on the development of a few TV shows and a new movie.

"There's a lot of talented funny people but getting a TV show actually produced and on the air or getting a movie in theatres is a very difficult proposition. You need to have a certain amount of infrastructure and a bankable company. Having been in the business now for awhile, with this success, that's what my company has, I can be that place now that people come to."

Butt has been the source of countless Canadians' entertainment throughout the year, whether it's been on stage or in front of the camera.

Asked what he does for his own entertainment, Butt says he enjoys comedy and detective movies.

"Good standup to me is really something magic. It can be god-awful and horrible as well, but when it's really good, it's something of magic to me.

"I also love old detective movies. That's one of the reasons I made No Clue. I'm a big fan of the detective genre, so I wanted to make a movie with a bit of homage to the old films."

Butt has put his light hearted, whimsical touch on everything comedic he touches. Asked why he chose this approach to comedy, he comfortably talked about being happy and authentic.

"My goal has always been to entertain. I think it comes back to that authenticity thing, what is real, I mean, for me.

"I'm a pretty easy going guy. It would be false for me to try and act, you know, edgy, dark, and try to be hip, when it's just not who I am. I'm not a cynical person.

"I feel that, of all the situations you could have landed in on earth, I landed in a pretty fantastic situation and scenario and I count my lucky stars. I'm a pretty happy guy, and as a result if comedy should be authentic, that's the place that I have to come from, and it's a place I'm happy to come from."

Grandmother shares her love

Older women provide support to new mothers who are overwhelmed

By Elaine Bombay

This grandmother's heart is big enough for everyone.

Since 2010, Joanne Wheatley has been a volunteer with Grandmother's Heart.

As a volunteer grandmother, Wheatley visits new moms once a week for six weeks. She sometimes helps with some light housekeeping or by reading to older children in the home. Other times, she takes the new mom out shopping or to appointments. Or she might just hold the baby so that mom can take an uninterrupted shower.

"I've always had a heart for young moms. Even as a teenager, I had a friend who was a single mom and who was ostracized at the time by the community. I just really felt to keep the friendship up. I guess that's how it started," she said.

That was when her concern for young women in crisis pregnancies started. Wheatley said a crisis pregnancy is when the woman feels that her pregnancy threatens her in some way and that abortion may be her only option.

In 1988, Wheatley served on the steering committee to start what is now known as the Belleville Pregnancy and Family Care Centre, located on Dundas Street East. The BPFCC is a Christian agency that serves pregnant women and new parents in a variety of ways, such as free pregnancy tests, prenatal decisions, parenting classes—including one just for dads—and post-abortion care.

The centre also provides practical help with clothing and equipment. Additionally, the centre offers a program



Photo by Elaine Bombay

Joanne Wheatley, a volunteer with Grandmother's Heart, poses for a photo in her home in Foxboro. Wheatley has been supporting new mothers through the Belleville Pregnancy and Family Care Centre for over 25 years.

for all women, even those without children, that helps them develop a healthy understanding of themselves in areas such as personality, boundaries, and relationships.

"We did a lot of research in the community to see if it was needed. There was a high rate of abortion in Ontario. One in three pregnancies was ending in abortion. We wanted to provide an alternative," said Wheatley.

The centre opened in 1990. Wheatley served as director from 1992 until 2010.

After stepping down as director, Wheatley wanted to stay involved, so she volunteered with Grandmother's

Heart.

Any new mother can sign up for a grandmother. Wheatley said that a lot of their clients are women with more than one child who are feeling a little overwhelmed.

Besides the practical help with dishes and laundry, Grandmother's Heart is mostly about friendship. It's about offering a listening ear and a loving heart to someone who is feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

Heather Tapp, director of BPFCC, said that those who have requested visits are those who may have no mentor or family support at a crucial time in

their lives. They really appreciate having someone visit and support them, she added.

Currently, there are three volunteer grandmothers. Tapp said that the program is under-utilized and she would love to see it grow.

The program officially offers one, two-hour visit a week for six weeks, although Wheatley will continue to visit unofficially if asked.

"Some move away and then you don't see them anymore, but there are one or two that I have an ongoing friendship with over the years. We get together," said Wheatley.