

Fiddling, stepdancing contest rite of passage

Editorial

By **PETER LAPINSKIE**

As the many competitors in the various fiddling and stepdancing categories file in to the Pembroke Memorial Centre today to begin competing in the 35th annual Pembroke Old Time Fiddling and Stepdancing Championships, it is worth considering what this event means to the city and to those who look forward to its arrival every year.

There is little debate as to the importance of this contest. After 35 years, it has become an iconic event that Pembroke is known for, and people come from far and wide to take in the competition and spend at least part of 'Fiddle Week' down at Fiddle Park, jamming and mingling and sharing their love of music, in particular old time fiddle music and its accompanying discipline of stepdancing. It is one of the events on the city's annual calendar that stands out, along with the Silver Stick, Waterfront Festival and Canada Day celebrations. People plan holidays around their participation in this event, either as competitors or audience members. You know your event is big when people plan their lives around it.

But aside from that, it has provided a stepping stone for many young musicians to 'cut their teeth' on performing live before a large crowd for the first time. This week, we ran a story on April Verch, who was all of two years old when she was called up onto the stage of the 1981 fiddling and stepdancing contest to dance a little jig, much to the delight of the musicians and audience. Little did we know then that she would go on to become the only female Grand Masters fiddling champion, and one of the performers in the spectacular opening ceremonies for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver. These days, April tours the world with her band and records albums, and she is gearing up for a concert tour in China next year. But it all began on the PMC stage some 29 years ago.

That is why we look upon the fiddling and stepdancing championships as a rite of passage, a beginning for many who love music and want to share that passion with others. Most don't make it as far as April Verch, but without question all of them have found an inner tranquility in their love of music that goes far beyond career or financial aspirations. To them, it is a way of life.

So enjoy their skills on display this weekend, and revel with them as they share their passion with you.