President’s Message – December 2012

As the holidays approach, I am always amazed at the incredible array of art and culture that exists in our province. It seems like there are more craft shows, art exhibits, theatre performances and concerts than ever at this time of year – including the recent performances by the University of Regina orchestra and choirs – and it’s wonderful to see people’s artistic talent on display.

I myself am not an artist, but from an early age I learned first-hand to appreciate the talents of others. My father, for example, could play nearly any musical instrument he picked up, and his natural musical ability was a key part of his identity.

The longer I live in Saskatchewan, the more I see that the arts are a key part of our province’s identity as well. Dr. Kathleen Irwin, a professor within the Faculty of Fine Arts, recently wrote me the following:

“Historically, the arts have been central to how we express who we are in Saskatchewan. In 1948, we became the first government in North America to establish an Arts Board dedicated to supporting and developing amateur and professional arts activity. The Saskatchewan Arts Board became a model for arts agencies elsewhere in North America, including the Canada Council for the Arts. Here in Saskatchewan, it reflected a grass-roots value system that placed the arts at the centre of the community and it manifested in town hall opera houses in many provincial towns that integrated culture with judicial, policing, military and local government activities. Traced back even further through a rich heritage, it is equally evident how First Nations’ determination to preserve their rights to creative expression have contributed substantially to the province’s cultural sector today.”

Dr. Irwin’s words underscore the importance of maintaining the historically vibrant arts culture in our province. We must continue to see the arts as a critical component of an educated society – beginning with our children, who benefit from participating in and experiencing the arts. Researchers have found close correlations between arts training and improvements in cognition, attention, and learning.

The more we include the arts in children’s education, the more we enhance their learning in other areas – something that is true at the university level as well. On its website, the University of Canterbury states that “Fine Arts graduates are skilled communicators, with a finely honed ability to convey messages in a range of ways,” who in their working lives can “draw on traits such as patience, resilience, persistence, flexibility and adaptability” in order to succeed. I couldn’t agree more.

The University of Regina has a Faculty of Fine Arts that offers programming in areas such as music, theatre, visual arts and media and production studies, and we also have a strong arts education program in the Faculty of Education. I am proud to see the impact our graduates make throughout Saskatchewan and beyond in careers ranging from artists and teachers to designers and business owners.
Being surrounded by music, art, film and drama means being part of a rich, vibrant community – and we are especially privileged in this regard during the holiday season. I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to experience the arts that are all around us at this time of year. Some of that art is currently on display in the President’s residence, so I invite you to join me there at 1001 McNiven Avenue for the annual holiday come-and-go reception for faculty and staff on Friday, December 7 between 2:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. Please confirm your attendance to this event by registering at http://www.uregina.ca/external/open-house/faculty-staff.html or by emailing rsvp@uregina.ca.

In the coming weeks, which I know are busy for everyone, I hope you have the opportunity, either on campus or in the larger community, to visit an art gallery, attend a play or concert, or go to a craft show. In short, during this holiday season, take time to celebrate the artistic talent that so many Saskatchewan people possess, and which is such an important part of our provincial identity.

Best wishes for the holiday season!

Sincerely,

Dr. Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor