

October 9, 2024

Festival Hall Director Rick Wharton announces retirement

After 13 years, Festival Hall @ L'Équinoxe Director Rick Wharton is retiring due to ongoing health concerns. During his tenure, Rick played an integral role in shaping the performing arts scene in Pembroke and the Ottawa Valley.

“Rick’s passion for and commitment to Festival Hall is clear to anyone who has had the chance to speak with him over the past 13 years. He has expanded the theatre’s programming and helped to make Festival Hall a modernized cultural hub in the Ottawa Valley,” said Festival Hall Consortium Chair, Murray Rutz. “We are grateful for his efforts and we wish him the best as he steps away to focus on his well-being.”

Rick Wharton said, “It is with a heavy heart that I step down from a role I’ve loved. After a long career in the arts, it’s time for me to focus on my health. Lorelei and I want to thank the incredible community in the Ottawa Valley for welcoming us and supporting Festival Hall over the years. We’ve built something special together, and I take comfort in knowing that the theatre will continue to thrive. I’m incredibly proud of what we’ve accomplished, and I look forward to seeing where Festival Hall goes from here. Thank you to the Consortium, school staff, artistic groups, donors, volunteers, and patrons who have each helped to make this dream a reality. Though this chapter is closing, we will always hold this place and the people in our hearts.”

Throughout his time as Director, Rick Wharton helped elevate Festival Hall to new heights, overseeing the growth of local programming, collaborating with artists from across Canada, and enhancing the theatre’s role as a cultural landmark in the Ottawa Valley. In addition to the countless community events and festivals, nationally-recognized artists and comedians including Randy Bachman, Johnny Reid, Dean Brody, Brett Kissel, Glass Tiger, Gowan, Rik Emmett, Gerry Dee, Marty Stuart, Ron James, Corb Lund, Jason Blaine, and more performed at the theatre under his direction.

Rick’s wife, Lorelei Wharton, will serve as Interim Director until December 31, 2024. Festival Hall remains open and upcoming events can be seen at festhall.ca. A search for Rick Wharton’s successor will begin immediately as the Consortium seeks to build on the foundation he leaves behind.

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