



Region of Waterloo Arts Organizations Join Together For Dementia-Friendly Community Spaces

June 1, 2017 – Nine of the Region of Waterloo’s leading arts organizations have united in a commitment to provide accessible and dementia-friendly spaces in the area’s major arts and cultural centres.

The Dementia Friendly Communities **Blue Umbrella Project**®, a training program offered through the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington and partnered locally with the Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program (MAREP), provides organizations with enhanced education about dementia along with strategies for specialized support and service to people living with people with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias and their care partners.

The participating arts organizations are collectively known as the **Alliance for a Grand Community** (AGC), a networking consortium of senior arts managers whose goal is to strengthen the impact of the arts and cultural sector through the sharing of best practices, collaboration, and cooperation.

Organizations and venues certified as dementia friendly through the Blue Umbrella Project® include:

- Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery
- Centre-in-the-Square
- Drayton Entertainment (Dunfield Theatre Cambridge & St. Jacobs Country Playhouse)
- Grand Philharmonic Choir
- Idea Exchange Art + Design
- Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
- Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony
- THEMUSEUM
- Region of Waterloo Museums
(Waterloo Region Museum, Doon Heritage Village, Schneider Haus, McDougall Cottage)

The combined annual attendance of these cultural attractions is **665,923**.

“It is imperative that we develop thoughtful and innovative approaches to support our aging population, and one’s involvement in the arts during all ages and stages of life,” says Steven Karcher, Executive Director of Drayton Entertainment and AGC Chair. “By working in partnership with fellow arts organizations, we can deliver a consistent customer experience across varying artistic disciplines.”

“This is an important first step for arts organizations to show their commitment to collaboration and cooperation in a way that is meaningful and impactful for an important segment of our community,” says Andrew Bennett, Executive Director of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony.

The training program was completed by front line staff at each member organization earlier this spring. It is estimated that in 2016 there were 564,000 persons in Canada living with dementia; by 2031 it is estimated that the number will increase to 937,000 (source: www.alzheimer.ca). Over 12,000 people over the age of 65 in Waterloo Wellington are afflicted by the disease.

“The intent of the program is to create a community that is dedicated to the safety and engagement of all its members, in which people living with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias, and their care partners, can easily identify businesses that have been trained to provide good and respectful customer service to people with dementia,” says Robin Smart, Public Education Coordinator at the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington. “It is wonderful to see that so many arts organizations are committed to being inclusive and accessible.”

People living with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias, and their care partners, can easily identify businesses and organizations that have been trained to provide appropriate and supportive customer service. Those who receive training and adopt the strategies will be designated as a dementia–friendly location and may display a blue umbrella decal in their window.

-30-

For more information about the Blue Umbrella project please contact:
Robin Smart, Public Education Coordinator at the Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington
rsmart@alzheimerww.ca (226) 314-0949 ext. 3013

For more information about the Alliance for a Grand Community please contact:
Steven Karcher, Executive Director at Drayton Entertainment
steven@draytonentertainment.com (519) 621-5511 ext. 234