

N.B.'s first music conservatory opens today

■ Chocolate River facility is ready to make sweet music in Metro Moncton for many years

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New Brunswick's first music conservatory, the brainchild of Juergen Welland and his wife Melody Dobson, will be officially opened today in a newly constructed building next to the old City Hall in downtown Dieppe.

However, more than just the ribbon-cutting ceremony today at 4 p.m., the new Conservatoire de musique Chocolate River Conservatory of Music will be heralded in by a whole weekend of grand-opening activities.

Included will be a Kitchen Party tomorrow at 7 p.m. with Maritime music provided by fiddlers Ivan Hicks, Ernest Despres, Jack Bulmer and Jacques Mainville, an Early Childhood Open House on Saturday, highlighted in the afternoon by the Chocolate River Children's Choir and two performances of Concert pour les petits by internationally acclaimed child entertainer Art Richard. On Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. there will be an Instrument Petting Zoo.

Weiland, the managing director of the conservatory, said yesterday that along with getting to "pet a bassoon," this will entail live music demonstrations and informal dialogue with teachers in the facility's studios.

"Don't miss the chance to see us up close and personal," he said.

Dobson, the conservatory's artistic director, said yesterday the final touches are being put on the building prior to this afternoon's ribbon cutting.

"It is very exciting to see. After two years of planning, this is it. Both of us (she and Juergen) are still in a kind of a fog and are just now realizing the magnitude of the



Juergen Welland, managing director, and his wife, Melody Dobson, artistic director, of the Chocolate River Conservatory of Music will see their dream realized today with the official opening of the building in Dieppe. Other events to mark the occasion are planned through the weekend.

project."

The facility was originally planned for Riverview (Dobson's hometown), to be located on her family's property at the corner of Findlay Boulevard and Whitepine Road. As the focal point of a \$2-million project, it was to be complemented by two adjacent buildings which would be leased out to businesses, with the revenue from those to fund the conservatory.

But the project hit the skids early last year when developers became frustrated over a raft of conditions imposed by area residents on the rezoning sought for the property. They said they would therefore look at locating in Moncton or Dieppe.

The City of Dieppe came through with an offer to put the conservatory in the middle of a downtown development plan with a strong cultural component. "This made it the perfect fit for the music conservatory," said Weiland.

As the centrepiece in an arts and culture complex in Dieppe's downtown core, it will be like a "beacon" to attract businesses and other development to the municipality, Mayor Yvon Lapierre said at the time.

The old city hall will be converted into a cultural centre and the adjacent fire station will be transformed into a 250-seat concert hall, both within two years. The conservatory, cultural centre and concert hall will be linked by an

atrium, which will serve as the main entrance and lobby for all three facilities and also double as an art gallery.

While awaiting construction of their permanent home, the conservatory began its music courses last fall in a house on Gauvin Road that had been purchased by the city.

Dobson said a lot of the conservatory's planning has been centred around meeting the needs of the bilingual, bi-cultural community represented in Metro Moncton.

"Despite accumulating experience internationally in music, I realize that each community is different," she said. "Each is its own beating organism and has its own needs. And we set out determined

to meet the musical demands in the community."

Earlier this week, Dobson said they decided to form an advisory committee of people culturally involved in the community, the parents of students and others.

"This will help us to get feedback from the various components of society on how we are doing, what is working and what other things we should be doing. We have to be flexible and ready to adjust."

For instance, a Dieppe woman phoned her recently and suggested the conservatory should have classical music appreciation classes for adults. "I told her that we need at least five people for a class, and if she could get four more people interested in it, we could offer that program. In less than two weeks, she had rounded up 12."

Since then, an opera appreciation program for adults was proposed, and sure enough, a more than sufficient number of interested people came forward to comprise a class. "When we started planning the conservatory, I would never have thought there would be enough interest in the area for an opera appreciation class."

Similarly, she said they had an after-school program of music instruction for school children, where the youngsters could be picked from the school and taken to the class. But they only had an English-language program for the after-schoolers.

Upon interest being expressed to her by several French-speaking parents that they, too, would be interested in having an after-school music program for their children, Dobson said she put their suggestion on the fast-track and, as a result, they will have a similar program ready for French-speaking children by September.

"A music conservatory is a community-centred facility and we are prepared to adjust at any time to meet the musical needs of the community we serve," said Dobson.