

New orchestra tuning up

As one local symphony faces bankruptcy, Cambridge organization tests the waters

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As the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony fights for its life, the fledgling Cambridge Community Orchestra wants to spread its wings.

Tonight, the two-year-old organization plans a public meeting to find out what kind of music people are willing to buy tickets to hear. And what kind of concert companies might be willing to sponsor.

Community feedback is key to building a business plan that gives the volunteer group a stable future, said Jill Summerhayes, chair of the board.

"Either we get grants or sponsors and have a future, or we don't and we have none."

Summerhayes is worried Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony's money troubles — \$2.5 million needed by month's end to stave off bankruptcy — may confuse people about tonight's meeting. There's no financial crisis at the Cambridge orchestra, which just wants to create a product people will support.

There might even be a bright side to the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony's troubles, if it survives but has to cut players, Summerhayes said.

"Then we may have a few more people of high calibre who are looking for somewhere else to play."

Today, the Cambridge orchestra has a core group of 28 volunteer musicians and 10 others who play from time to time. For big concerts, such as the one held in Hespeler in July, the orchestra was salted with a few paid professionals to challenge and educate players.

"They raise the level and encourage the others," Summerhayes said. "Most orchestras do this in the beginning and hope they reach the level where they don't have to do this."

The volunteer musicians and board members pay \$30 a year to be part of the Cambridge orchestra, Summerhayes said. This year, the budget was about \$4,000 to put on four concerts. In 2005, the orchestra received a \$6,200 grant from the Mayor's Night for the Arts fundraiser.

"We live on a skeletal budget," Summerhayes said.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation recently gave \$27,000 to the orchestra this year to help shape its future.

Part of the money will be used to hire a part-time conductor for 10 months, starting in January. That will cost \$12,500. Interviews are underway.

Another \$10,000 was spent to hire

ORCHESTRA DATES

Where to find out more about the Cambridge Community Orchestra:

■ A public meeting will be held tonight at 7 in the third-floor meeting room of the David Durward Centre at Dickson and Wellington streets.

■ A meeting will be held early next year to unveil the volunteer orchestra's business plan.

■ www.cambridgeorchestra.ca

business consultant Ted Boyd. He's creating a business plan, looking five years ahead. The remaining \$4,500 will be used for administrative costs.

The Cambridge Community foundation also gave \$1,000 to buy sheet music.

Ann Green of Cambridge helped found the Cambridge orchestra and will remain its conductor until the end of the year, Summerhayes said.

Green plans to remain a part of the orchestra as a musician.

No public fundraising is underway. First, the orchestra has to build a community profile by putting on six or seven concerts a year, Summerhayes said. This could happen in three years. Other people and organizations will be willing to underwrite the cost of concerts she said.

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