

## **Smiles, Memories and Discoveries**

What is so special about the shortest month that comes around once a year? Ask anyone who resides in Vernon, and their answer would be none other than the Vernon Winter Carnival. Winter carnival spirit arrives early on in the month when all the businesses around the community liven up their storefront windows with the years' carnival theme. This only marks the beginning. For me, Robert Yacovelli, someone who has grown up in Vernon for the past 18 years, the Vernon Winter Carnival has helped contribute to who I am today. The Vernon Winter Carnival has always been a highlight early on in the year. By creating memories, forming traditions and building a greater sense of community within. The Vernon Winter Carnival is a staple of ours and will continue to be for years to come.

There are countless memories that I can retell, although some highlight the importance of the Vernon Winter Carnival to me in-depth. For over six years I was a part of the Sadok Ukrainian Dance Ensemble. Consequently, this meant that our ensemble had the opportunity to participate in several events such as competing in the Bandarama. Although, the standout event would be the all-time famous Winter Carnival parade. The parade provided a sort of stage to perform, show off some dance skills and spread carnival cheer. To a kid in elementary school, it was like being the celebrity of class when I got to tell all my friends to keep an eye out for me in the parade. Performing, handing out candy and smiling were only one part of the equation. Alongside knowing the parade was televised, for a seven-year-old, this only heightened the excitement for the annual parade that much more. Since these early days, our family traditions have never been the same at the beginning of February.

Aside from attending the parade every year, our family traditions around carnival time always highlight the best of winter times together. By providing an outlet to become closer and have fun as a family, the numerous winter carnival events we attended every year will have me telling these stories to my kids. Although it did not happen every year, the hot air balloon fiesta is one of my favourites that we would attend. Something about those floating balloons in the sky remind me of simpler times. The skating events and in more recent years, the family day event have also become a family favourite. The Vernon Winter Carnival has allowed the opportunity wherein the events allowed to not only spend time with family but with friends alike. This highlights another key aspect of why the Winter Carnival is so important.

On a larger scale, the Vernon Winter carnival has had a noticeable ripple effect on the community altogether. Not only does it bring together passionate volunteers and community members, but it connects friends and family who want a good time together. From the chilli cook-off to the polar bear swim there is nothing short of smiles throughout all Winter Carnival festivities. The Vernon Winter Carnival allows for discovery within our community as well. Live

music, skiing, swimming, different food and drink are a few of the highlights that allow for discovery within our very own community. The festival has a way of strengthening a community as vibrant as Vernon's. Each year this remains true.

All the memories that continue to be made throughout the carnival would not be possible without the generous sponsors, volunteers and the Vernon Winter Carnival Society. I would wish to extend my deepest appreciation to those involved in making a kid's childhood that much more memorable. The Vernon Winter Carnival holds a special place in our community; it has been made clear that Vernon would not be the same without it. As the sixty-first Winter Carnival unwinds, here is to many more smiles, memories and discoveries.