

PAMA focused on being go-to resource for families this summer

By Rob Paul

Normally when the summer begins there's all kinds of outdoor activities, camps, and sports for kids to be involved in, and despite Ontario beginning to open up as the pandemic slows down, this summer could still be a slow one.

With that in mind, Peel Art Gallery, Museum, and Archives (PAMA) is pouring resources into ensuring that kids and adults can have some fun while enjoying art and culture this summer.

PAMA would usually be running events and programs for everyone, but with the second straight summer being interpreted by COVID-19, Erin Fernandes, PAMA Marketing Coordinator, says they're here to ensure everyone has something to do.

"Each summer we usually run an in-person summer staycation program as well as our summer camps," said Fernandes. "Like last summer, because we've been closed for COVID, we're doing an extended summer staycation—it's under our PAMA Kids umbrella. This year it's weekly downloadable activities under the theme of the great outdoors."

It's not ideal circumstances and Fernandes knows most people will want to be outside during the nice weather, but PAMA still wants to be able to provide some activities for when kids need them.

"We recognize that everyone is feeling a little bit tired of being online through COVID," she said. "So, we're trying to create some activities where we know people want to be outside so if it's a rainy day or you're looking for some activities if you can't be outside, we've got activities focused on connecting with nature."

Dealing the pandemic for over a year has led PAMA to putting together all sorts of online activities for families to utilize and they're all archived and accessible for free online.

Throughout the pandemic PAMA has had the opportunity to have outdoor exhibits, have showcased various artists on banners outside the gallery, and have tried to tie their online programming and activities to their exhibits.

"We've got this beautiful botanical exhibit right now with artist Sara Angelucci that kicked off in May so it's timely to tie it to that," she said. "She goes out into nature, and she scans organic plants at night and it's really cool. We have these three beautiful botanical pieces on the banners. Plus, we have a virtual exhibit right now to complement it and a family guide to go through it online. We also have some more adult focused things like crosswords that tie into it and we've had some trivia and artist talks."

"We do a monthly family fun activity that we do year-round. This month it's tying to the botanicals. We create a video showing you how to do it and then we have a downloadable activity to do the step-by-step instructions."

All summer, PAMA will be running virtual workshops with a special guest leading and teaching them and the workshops will have corresponding activities for the kids to continue to be engaged through.

"We've got our live workshops that also focus on the outdoors and combining various themes," Fernandes said. "We just did one that ties into Sara's workout that was a zentangle artwork shop. These workshops have various special guests and they're on Wednesdays. On July 28 we have Ecosource coming. They'll be doing a chat about local food and how to put together local snacks, it will be a fun cooking demo. The last one will be August 4 and it's a soccer fitness training demo to get the kids active."

Although a lot of the events and resources on the PAMA website are geared more towards kids, Fernandes says they have an adult focused night coming up to help ease the anxiety people have dealt having lived through a pandemic for over a year.

"We have a virtual paint night for adults, and it ties in with the Sara Angelucci botanical exhibition?" it's August 12," she said. "We're very family focused at PAMA, but we also want to cater to the adult market to help connect them with art and outlet as well."

Fernandes highlights that the move to doing the vast majority of work in the online realm has provided PAMA with the time to finally invest into their virtual resources the way they've always wanted to." she's particularly happy with their YouTube page

"It's been hard for the cultural industry to figure things out," she said. "For us we did see it as an opportunity because we've been talking about doing more online forever, but you have so much put into the on-site experience. We've been lucky with the pivot to virtual because we have Regional resources and have a whole web team ready at our disposal to help us.

"We've had our differences and challenges, but it's been an amazing opportunity to do things that haven't been able to do before. We're really trying to think of all the different ways people can use culture to connect, we're looking at what do different people need right now."

There's been another silver lining through the struggles of COVID for PAMA: they teamed up with other museums and galleries across Canada to provide a resource online called Field Trip: Art Across Canada (www.fieldtrip.art). The website has children's programs, artist talks, and workshops.

"We've been in very close contact with cultural institutions across Canada," she said. "It's been amazing to see everyone band together. We've had to rely on each other throughout COVID. There's some major art galleries and museums that came together and we've been lucky to be part of it. We've done special virtual field trips on there?" it's one website that can give you a whole experience across Canada."

As with everyone else, the pandemic has been a hard time for PAMA, particularly with having to pivot to a virtual platform while losing staff that were needed to help fight against the pandemic.

"Because we're owned and operated by the Region of Peel, we had some extreme challenges," Fernandes said. "Our staff have been pulled towards the mass vaccination efforts. First it was the call to assist in long-term care during the first wave?" every team across the board at PAMA had staff redeployed to help. A few of us stayed behind to keep the wheels in motion at PAMA, but still to this day we have staff being deployed to help in vaccination clinics. That's one of the reasons why we probably won't open, as you see other cultural institutions open in July and August."

As the Region continues in the vaccination efforts, PAMA is still short staffed and doesn't have a public reopening date as of yet, but Fernandes is hopeful it will be sooner rather than later.

"We will have more information in the coming weeks about our reopening plans. Just continue to keep an eye on our website and social media for more info and updates."

For more information on PAMA and the upcoming virtual summer events and to access activities for children, visit pama.peelregion.ca/en/index.asp.