



MANITOBA Town & Country

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PRIDE NORTH OF 55

PRIDE

North of 55 group provides support and representation

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WAPUSK

DOGS' BEST FRIEND

Churchill musher and his faithful tea

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FLIN FLON

HOMECOMING 2017

Flin Flon pulls out all the stops

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Connecting touring musicians with the North

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STRIKING A POSITIVE NOTE

CONCERT HELPS FEED THE HUNGRY BEARS FOOD BANK

BY KRISTIN MARAND

In a small pub in Churchill on Nov. 12, a capacity crowd of 80 was treated to an intimate performance by renowned Manitoba musician John K. Samson. The benefit concert is part of a plan to bring attention to the town's economic situation and to raise funds for the Hungry Bears Food Bank.

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John Gunter, CEO of Frontiers North Adventures, conceived the idea of a benefit with Belinda Fitzpatrick, owner of the Tundra Inn. They settled on the concept of a concert instead of a rally in order to maintain positivity.

"My personal thought is that with a rally, we could be inviting an element of negativity and this was strictly about looking at where we are now and how we help get the workers in the community of Churchill to whatever's next on the horizon employment-wise," says Gunter.

As northern Canada's only deep-water port, Churchill is a key sovereign asset. The federal government recently announced \$4.6 million in funding for economic development through Western Economic Diversification. However, Gunter and Fitzpatrick recognized that while such a stimulus package will contribute to mid- and long-term needs of the community, it won't meet immediate needs.

"While the major stakeholders are scurrying around trying to put together a solution for the community of Churchill, our role here is to help bridge that gap for the laid-off workers and their families to get through the winter," Gunter explains.

Gunter and Fitzpatrick decided that the best way to support workers and their families was to promote and raise funds for the local food bank. With the holiday season just around the corner and continued high food costs in the North, it was also important that the burden of supporting those out of work in Churchill didn't rest solely on the shoulders of the townspeople.

"The main reason for inviting John (Samson) is because he's got an audience all over Canada and all over the world and we saw this as an opportunity to get this message beyond the community of Churchill and to have people from without Churchill understand the issue that the town is faced with and to help us support the food bank," Gunter says.

Samson, formerly of The Weakerthans, said in a press release that he was "thrilled and honoured to be invited to play in Churchill. We want the community to know that Manitobans are thinking of them, and hope we can help spread the word."

For Gunter, the choice of performer represented a long-

time aspiration as well as an alignment of circumstance.

"I've always been a fan of John Samson and had been trying to find a way to sneak him up to Churchill to do a concert. However, our company's causes have always been around polar bear conservation and acknowledging that John writes songs about people and people's stories, there never really was a good fit until these layoffs occurred," he says.

"This is all about the people of Churchill."

At the height of tourist season, the crowd was a mix of locals, tourists and seasonal workers. Gunter describes the crowd as being comprised of two types of people.

"There were people who had never heard of him before, who had never heard of The Weakerthans or Propagandhi, who ended up being like, 'Oh that's pretty good.'" And the other half of the room, there were people who literally had the lyrics of some of the songs tattooed on their backs. Die-hard fans who knew all the words who were blown away. And it worked well; the songs worked well, the style of music worked well, and it was just such a positive event. It was a lot of fun to be a part of."

Samson and his band also raised funds for the food bank at shows in Winnipeg in early November, collecting about \$1,000 as well as non-perishable food items. Unfortunately, with tourism season at an end, chartered planes will no longer be flying to Churchill and getting physical donations into town is both expensive and cumbersome.

As such monetary donations are encouraged, and Gunter has been urging companies with interests in the community to contribute as well. Donations can be made online at www.hungrybears.ca.

(ABOVE) MUSICIAN JOHN K. SAMSON'S CONCERT AT THE TUNDRA INN WAS A BENEFIT FOR CHURCHILL'S FOOD BANK.