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Lenyk not 'LAC'ing in experience

By **MIKE BEGGS**

Perhaps, no one – this side of Mayor Hazel – has done more to pump up Mississauga than Ron Lenyk.

So, the former long-time publisher of The Mississauga News seems somewhat of a natural choice to be named the new chief executive officer of the city's Living Arts Centre, which has struggled at the gate since its inception in 1997.

He started work on September 1, replacing outgoing CEO Gerry Townsend (who has stayed on as vice president of business affairs).

"It's really exciting," he says. "I was at the meeting where the idea of a Living Arts Centre was first discussed."

The LAC board of directors unanimously approved a search committee's recommendation of Lenyk's hiring in mid-August. This came after an exhaustive interview process with 110 applicants.

Board Chair Ronald J. Nisbet says Lenyk's business savvy, energy, myriad of local contacts, and interest in the arts all factored into the decision.

"We wanted somebody with that business background, who wanted to carry it into the arts," he says. "We thought he was just a good, good fit for the position."

"His media background is important. And he seems to be able to get the best out of people. He certainly wouldn't be what I'd call a patient individual -- he likes to get things done. And I think that's a good thing in this position."

Lenyk's 40-year-plus stay at The Mississauga News is almost legendary. German-born and raised in Etobicoke, he passed through Ryerson University's Radio and Television Arts program before signing on as a sportswriter with The News in 1970. He became an editor a year later, publisher of The Brampton Guardian in 1977 and publisher of The Mississauga News in 1978. In 2004, he was named regional publisher, and vice president of the Metroland Media Group.

His achievements included the introduction of colour photographs throughout the newspaper, a sophisticated neighbourhood distribution system, the introduction of community specific editorial coverage, and first-in-world implementation of a full desktop pagination system of production.

In 2001, he became the first Canadian recipient of the Dean Lester Award for outstanding service to the suburban



A new era begins. Ron Lenyk (R) has take over the post as CEO of the Living Arts Centre from Gerry Townsend (L). Lenyk's term began Sept 1st. Townsend will stay on as vice president Corporate Business Affairs.

Photo by Stephen Uhraney

newspaper industry in North America.

He also worked overtime building up such community projects as The Mississauga News

Christmas Bureau Fund, and the Sports Celebrity Dinner, to name but two.

Lenyk's high profile in the Mississauga

community, and well-placed corporate contacts should benefit the LAC, which will present such big-name acts as comedian Howie Mandel, pop icon Paul Anka, and The State Ballet Theatre Of Russia this season, but still has a hard time drawing Mississaugans out for a night.

"I'm hoping it does. And that's one of the strategies of building the brand," he says.

"And I'm also looking forward to implementing some new ideas. This is a city changing constantly, day to day, and we're looking at changing with it. Part of my plan is to involve the students at Sheridan College's new downtown campus. And 50 per cent of Mississauga don't have English as a first language, so we're looking at starting to do that."

While the 225,000 square foot LAC was a bit of a white elephant to the city in its early years, according to Lenyk they turned that around eight or nine years ago under Townsend's leadership.

"I'm not taking over the Titanic," he muses. "It's well-run. Financially it doesn't cost the taxpayers any money."

Plain and simple, he says the LAC's problem is simply the size of Hammerson Hall theatre, with seating for 1,200.

"It was built too small and it limits the acts you can bring in," he comments. "We're not supported by a casino. We're only supported by ticket sales. If you book a headliner who demands a lot of money, it makes the tickets too expensive."

He stresses that, "the LAC is much more than the two theatres."

"It's a Living Arts Centre. We have seven arts and craft studios. The place is busy with dance recitals, college graduations, corporate rentals, ethnic rentals. It's a big facility -- but it's one of Mississauga's best-kept secrets," he continues. "And that's one of the things we're going to work on is the branding, and maximizing exposure. In 10 years, we've attracted more than 3.5 million people. That's a lot of visitors, and yet people only see the LAC. Presents part of the picture."

At 64, this father of two, and grandfather of one views his new post as, "a great challenge". And he cites, "the mentorship shown by our 92 year old mayor."

"I'm kind of an anomaly, because I love sports and the arts," he adds. "It has always made me sad that there's a Sports Hall Of Fame in Mississauga, but nothing for the arts."

The LAC also has a new director of marketing and communications, Carla Selzer.

Law Summit big success

There are three things about crises that all managers and business owners should remember: 1) they don't come labelled as "crises," 2) they can come from anywhere and 3) they can strike at any time.

"Preparing for your next workplace crisis" was the theme of the sixth annual Business Law Summit held in September and sponsored by Pallett Valo LLP, Mississauga's largest business law firm.

Eight speakers from Workplace Safety and Prevention Services, Edelman Canada, H&A eDiscovery, and Pallett Valo LLP covered topics and strategies that included public relations, workplace accidents, legal, and electronic evidence preservation.

Here are four specific things to keep in mind that may keep you out of a crisis:

COMPUTERS: It is a common misperception that computer files belong to employees; they in fact belong to the employer. When employees delete computer files, they are not gone. Those files can be brought back by IT forensic experts. So,

when a disgruntled employee leaves, you may be able to access their computer files. You can get a sense of the damage they may have caused. Did they take customer lists, for example?

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Because of social media, employers have less and less control of "the message." Today, transparency and honesty are key to dealing with all audiences.

WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS: Recording and reporting "near-misses" is just as important as reporting accidents. Why? Because "near misses" will allow employers to put in place procedures and steps to deal with them, thereby often preventing the serious accidents from occurring.

LITIGATION: Before you jump into litigation, be aware of the time, money, people, and other resources needed. You may decide not to go down that route and resolve the issue out of court. Litigation should be a last resort.



Business Law Summit facilitator Jeffrey Percival of Pallett Valo LLP with Karen Groulx of Pallett Valo and Abbas Najarali of H & A eDiscovery Inc. at the Business Law Summit at the LAC.

Photo by Peter McCusker