

**WINTER LIGHT**  
ADVENTURES IN EDMONTON  
**2009-2011**





# RE-IMAGINING WINTER CULTURE



## WINTERLIGHT

"... the joy, the creativity, and the cultural energy the Winter Light concept has brought to our chilly community... should be an inspiration, and a goad, to us all..."

- Paula Simons, Edmonton Journal

**ON** October 9, 2008, Edmonton City Council approved and funded Winter Light, a pilot project proposed by the Edmonton Arts Council with the broad mission to 'celebrate Edmonton's winter spirit'. The project was approved unanimously as a first step in the City's larger overall strategy to recast Edmonton as a livable winter city. In funding the Winter Light project, Council directed the Edmonton Arts Council to:

- Develop new winter festivals
- Strengthen existing winter events
- Promote civic enthusiasm for winter experience

To achieve these goals the Edmonton Arts Council formed the Winter Light project team, charged with artistic, production and market development as described by the proposal. The EAC provided leadership and organizational support to the project, and fostered a deep network of citizen support to guide the project, including a Steering Committee, a Visioning Group, and several cultural Advisory Circles.

In addition to the 3 primary goals, the project mandate incorporated a wide range of directives integral to the City's strategic plans. These included supporting new community initiatives and cultural diversity, establishing organizational and production capacity for winter events, extending the festival city brand, and marketing positive winter city messages.



# EXPERIMENT & SUCCESS



**DURING** the 3-year pilot project, 2009-2011, the Winter Light team produced and promoted 26 festival events in the capital region, drawing on and integrating the city's rich resources in art, recreation and heritage. Combined audiences for winter festivals in Edmonton now exceed 140,000.

The Winter Light project team interpreted the City's mandate by developing a season-long series of new festivals that wholeheartedly embraced winter as a positive feature of a northern lifestyle.

Imagination and artistry abounded as festival gatherings animated the themes of 'light, action, and fire' across the city's winter landscape. Audience experience was critical to the core mission, and protocols of 'artistic excellence' 'free access' and 'warm welcome' were embedded in festival designs.

**"The best thing about Edmonton – Winter Light festival is sheer brilliance!! Keep it burning."**

- A.G., from the comment book

The project contributed to and collaborated with Edmonton's 3 existing winter festivals, Deep Freeze, Ice on Whyte and Silver Skate. New resources, cultural activity and promotion strengthened their programming capacity and refreshed their civic profile as established events.

**"Each Winter Light event has been surprising and delightful – Edmonton has become a treasure map of winter magic!"**

- Auralia, via email

Winter Light's marketing and communications strategies had a measurable impact in Edmonton, and reached out into regional and national markets. Vigorous advertising, communications and social messages stimulated public interest and media attention for the new project and in the winter city message. New audiences emerged for Winter Light's nascent events, and the 3 existing festivals gained significant increases in attendance.

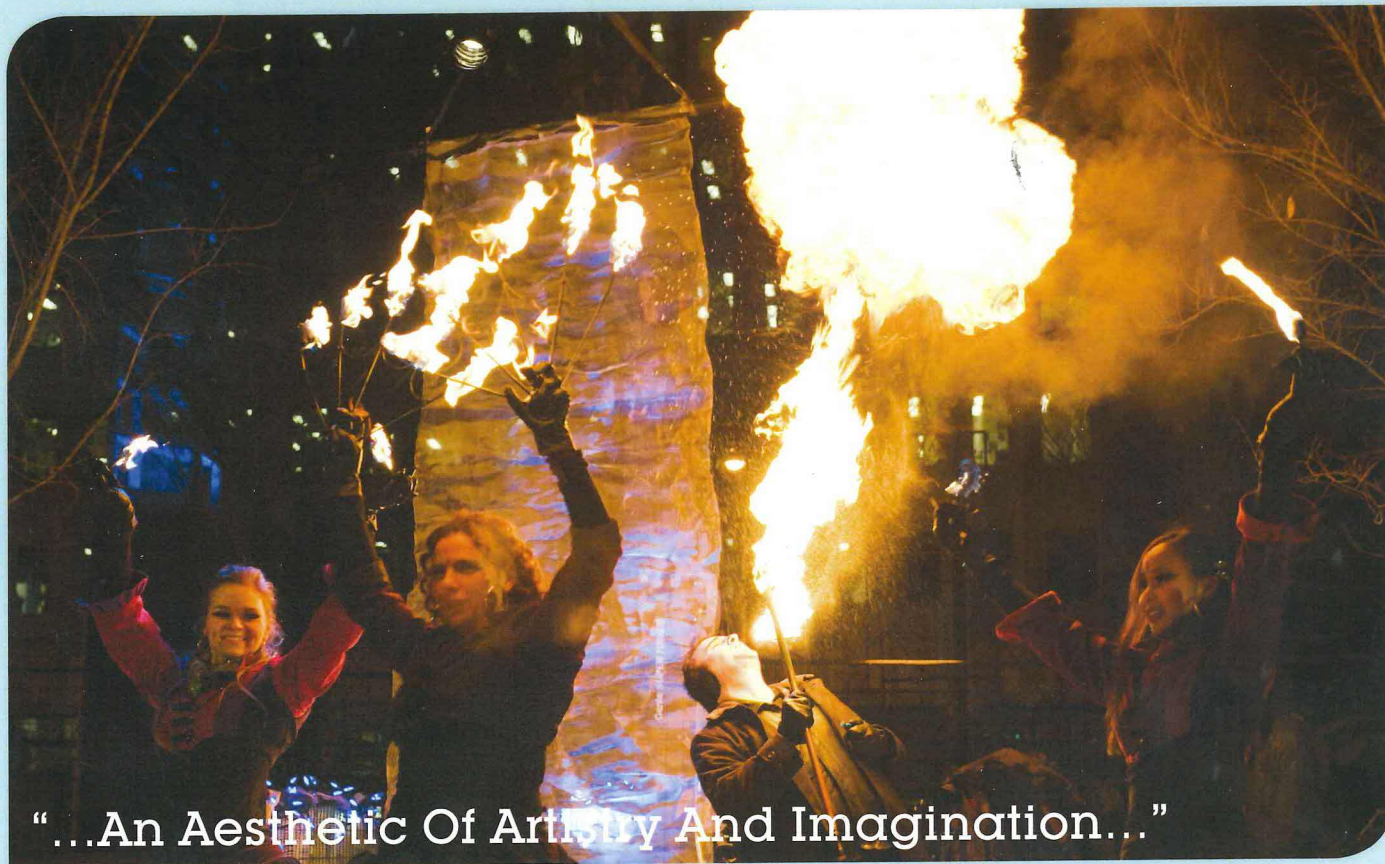
## ATTENDANCE CHART

Winter festival attendance (all events)

2009	70,000
2010	120,000
2011	140,200



# CREATING NEW WINTER EXPERIENCE



“...An Aesthetic Of Artistry And Imagination...”

**THE CITY** directive to enliven and ‘festivalize’ Edmonton’s winter months ignited the imagination of the project programming team and quickly generated an avalanche of winter cultural activity in Edmonton.

Light was the creative focus - as a medium, as a message. The dark nights of Edmonton’s winter landscape provided the ideal canvas, and the universal desire for light and warmth provided a meaningful core to the cultural activity. The theme of light was approached in traditional and contemporary forms, through design, lanterns, media, and fire, and as a source of story, knowledge and inspiration.

Creative collaboration and integration of multiple programming threads were the artistic hallmark of Winter Light’s direction. Participants from across the cultural spectrum were challenged to embrace winter as an inspiration and venue for their work. Interconnected programming circles, with well-known artists and non-mainstream contributors working together, pioneered new alliances and designed unique events that showcased Edmonton’s abundant cultural resources.

As artists explored urban venues and parks across the City, Winter Light created new spaces for cultural experience, and drew attention to the beauty of Edmonton’s remarkable winter landscape.

Arts & Programming Leaders: Pamela Anthony, Tim Folkmann, Memi von Gaza, Dylan Toymaker, Matt Vest, Debbie Houle, Jar-et Sinclair, Matt DeCore, Sherrilyn Jahrig, Talia Morrissey, Andrew Bursey, Rebecca Starr, Betty Grudnizki, Angus Sagan, Ian Jackson, Bob Rasko, Vibe Tribe, FireFly Theatre, Rapid Fire Theatre, Circus Orange, River Valley Programs, Ritchie Velthuis, PlayDays Canada

**Thank you so much for giving Edmonton a reason to get out of our winter shell and enjoy the beauty of nature and art combined. Another success. Congrats! Proud to Live in Edmonton. This is so cool!**

- Aidan



# POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

**WINTER LIGHT** went in search of an audience and found a wonderfully diverse demographic. The existing winter festivals already had active audiences, and it appeared new communities were eager to test the climate. Families, festival-goers, and outdoor enthusiasts brought curiosity and energy to Winter Light events.

New events were free and accessible. The project's outreach, social media and general marketing carried the message 'all welcome', and events were designed to be attractive to multi-cultures and multi-generations. Diverse programming threads drew audiences interested in exploring nature, art, culture, and winter recreation.

Critical to developing a strong audience was the quality of experience people found at the festivals. Appeal, atmosphere, attitude, and affiliation were key, as were a sense of comfort and safety. Integrated 'welcome programs' addressed these ideals directly and were crafted to reinforce positive experience of winter.

Capital city and regional audiences responded, and the outdoor festivals found resonance within a population eager to refresh their perspective on Edmonton's winter season.

Attendance at winter events in Edmonton doubled following the project launch, and audiences at individual events for both new and existing festivals continued to grow steadily during the course of the 3-year pilot project.

Winter Light festival is sheer brilliance! Keep it burning. Edmonton has become a treasure map of winter magic! Winter Light is the place to be! Yay! Lots of fun. Great winter activity.

- Brandy

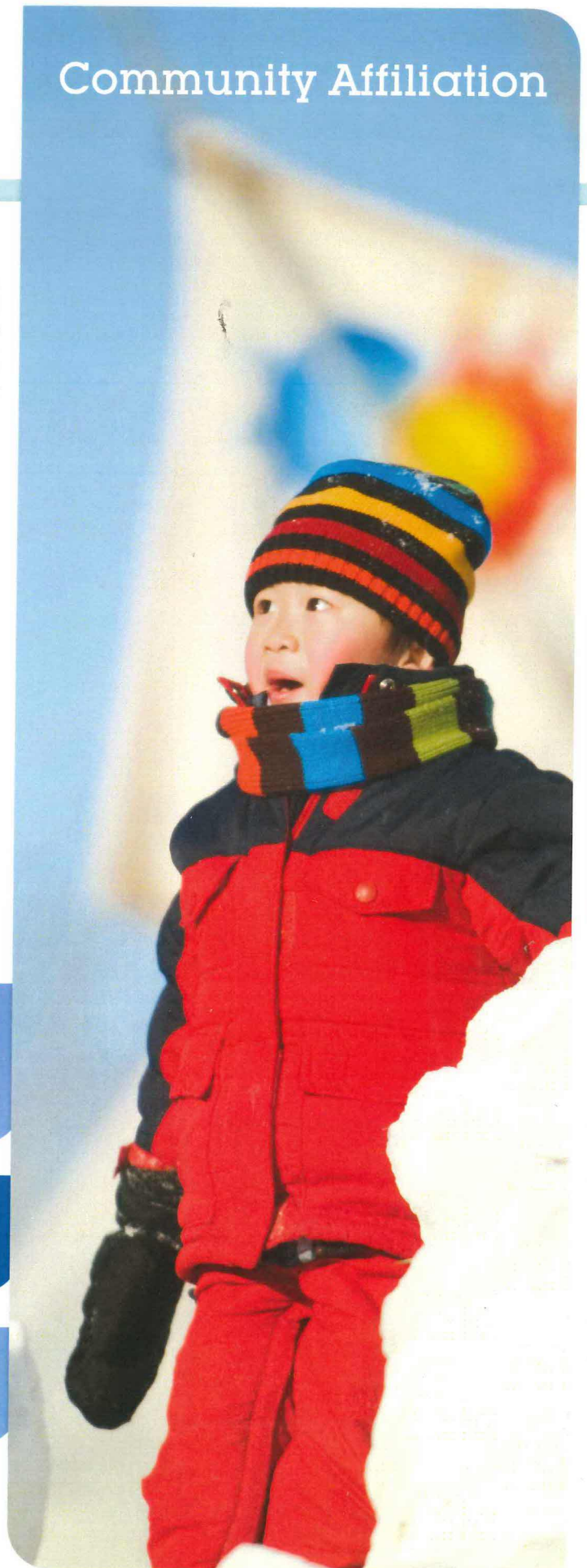
Winter and the extreme cold are the best things about Edmonton. Thanks for celebrating them!

- Tim Bowling

Beautiful! Très beau! Merci!

- Guillaume Cosiette

## Community Affiliation





# MESSAGING

## COLD CLIMATE – WARM SELL

**EMBEDDED** in the pilot project mandate was the broad challenge 'to promote positive civic winter attitudes in Edmonton'. Developing positive winter experience was seen by both the City and the event organizers as a key factor in refreshing Edmonton's 'quality of life' and developing a civic-wide conversation about the potential of our winter city. Brainstorming sessions helped define the communication strategy: to frankly acknowledge winter barriers but focus firmly on winter's unique attraction as a distinct season.

A positive message about 'winter experience' was embedded in an attractive 'winter festival' event pitch, designed to motivate both public opinion and festival attendance. Strategies like challenge, humour, nostalgia and enthusiasm were employed in communications. Slogans, key words and visual images reinforced positive, fun ideas about winter and promoted the 'cool' aspects of festival programming:

**Light It Up  
Step Outside  
Warm up to Winter  
Life Begins at -40**

Communications were carried by established media and public networks, then expanded quickly into extensive personalized audience outreach and active social marketing. Both strategies were invaluable in building the word-of-mouth communication, and attract a key target audience.

**"@WinterLightFest was amazing last night! Way to go #yeg!"**

The organization's direct communication efforts reached approximately 500 media outlets, 2800 ebulletin subscribers, 2300 Facebook friends, and 700 Twitter followers.

**"...a reason to get out of our winter shell and enjoy the beauty of nature and art combined. Another success - congrats! Proud to live in Edmonton"**

- info@email



## TESTIMONIALS

Thank you for the winter wonderland! It's magical! Fantastic!  
Kim and Eric

Quelle belle soir! This is amazing! An all-new perspective. Bravo! Merci!

Thank you for the magical winter walk. It was a mystical fantastic experience. I heart it, thanks, Ocean.

Very cool! I've lived here for so long and never known about this! I'm definitely getting involved next year!

Brilliant! I really appreciate it and it makes for an eventful day. Thank you, Edmonton Winter Light for organizing this. INSPIRING!

Thanks for the amazing adventure. One of the best things in Edmonton, ever. Totally awesome. I am so glad I came!

Keep up the good work with your winter festivals. I wish we had them back home. We love it here.  
Jim and Verna Ferguson, Oshawa ON.

We love Winter Light! ♥♥♥  
Sean's family.

Totally magical.... a pretty star village in the snow. So beautiful!

This is so great and good! I love it!  
😊

Proud to be an Edmontonian tonight! What a beautiful event!

What a halcyon atmosphere. So well executed! Loved it. Looking forward to more.



# 2009

## PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS WINTER LIGHT TIMELINE

**Baba Yaga Trail Adventure** (Jan 30)    **Family Day Global Village** (Feb 20)    **Snow Daze** (Mar 5 – 6)  
**Winter Light Gala** (Jan 9)    **Hearts of Fire** (Feb 14)    **Snow Reels** (Mar 1 – 4)    **Star Party, Coronation** (Mar 7)  
**Light Meadow Mill Creek** (Feb 7)    **Star Party, Elk Island National Park** (Feb 28)    **Illuminations** (Mar 21)



*The inaugural winter light programming team, on the steps of city hall for the Winter Light project launch.*

### Winter Light Gala (Jan 9)

#### *Setting out on a creative journey*

The first Winter Light event was a collage performance, art, lights and music. This multi-disciplinary approach characterized the artistic philosophy of Winter Light: excellence in individual arts, integration through festival design.

### Baba Yaga Trail Adventure (Jan 30)

#### *Seeking adventure and finding reward*

Recreation director Matt Décore had an indelible impact on Winter Light. Matt, along with Memi Von Gaza as lead artist and story teller, helped develop the adventure walk concept that became emblematic of the project's originality in programming. His athlete's perspective brought the rewards of physical action, challenge and achievement into the winter landscape. These quests approached winter with energy, courage and joy, and reflected the adventurous heritage that infuses Edmonton's character.

### Light Meadow Mill Creek (Feb 7)

#### *Testing the 'art possible'*

Highly experimental conditions awaited artists in the winter environment. Contemporary dancer and choreographer Kathy Ochoa was among the first to accept the challenge, developing a 3 part dance installation that was performed at Snow Valley, Silver Skate, Mill Creek and Churchill Square. The work commented on the art form with humour and irony (*Black Swan Snow Lake, Solid Gold Lame*) and was an illustration of the strength and vulnerability of the human body, a central under current of winter experience.



*Local hero and aboriginal elder Lloyd Auger examines Joe Renaud's fire sculpture.*

### Hearts of Fire (Feb 14)

Festivals celebrated inner city spirit through traditional knowledge, feasting and outdoor games. Lloyd later that day challenged former soccer champ, and Winter Light executive assistant, Talia Morrissey to a lively scrimmage of 'yoga ball soccer'.

### Family Day (Feb 20)

#### *A global family*

Outreach spurred an array of showcases for the city's cultural diversity. In event-based visual art the flag parade project linked 100 community artists together for a brilliant exhibit on the theme of family.



### Snow Reels (Mar 1 – 4)

#### *A medium for the message*

Local media artists like Will Bauer, Lindsay McIntyre, Tim Folkmann and Jeremy Rittwage regularly experimented within the festival, creating original work in the urban landscape. Metro Cinema provided a local venue for speciality films from northern communities around the world.



### Star Party, Coronation (Mar 7)

#### *Beauty at any temperature*

Overcast skies and record cold temperatures couldn't dampen enthusiasm for this outstanding star party. From inside warm tipis, the music of Andrea House and Chris Smith carried out on the wind, where sidewalk astronomers regaled the hardy and curious with stories of 'extreme astronomy' and star lore. A surprise performance from visiting Inuit throat singers created a haunting reminder of the deep traditions of northern life and art.



# 2010

## PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS WINTER LIGHT TIMELINE

**Mispon** (Jan 6)      **Olympic Torch Celebrations** (Jan 13)      **Hearts of Fire** (Feb 13)      **Big Winter** (Feb 26 -27)      **Illuminations** (Mar 12-13)  
**Baba Yaga Trail Adventure** (Jan 22-23)      **Family Day** (Feb 15)      **Star Party** (Mar 6)  
**24hrs to Ignition** (Jan 21)

### Mispon (Jan 6)

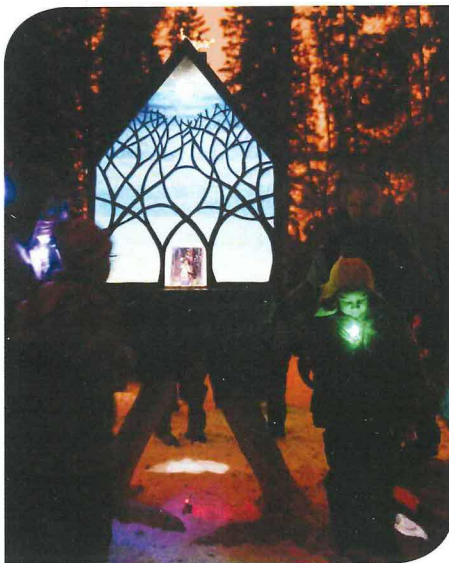
#### *A traditional perspective*

Fire was central to every Winter Light event, providing light, warmth, ceremony and beauty. Elders like Betty Lafferty and Toni Calihoo offered prayers rooted in traditions of thankfulness, hospitality, tolerance and welcome, and spoke of the earth's regenerative power under the blanket of winter.

### Baba Yaga Trail Adventure (Jan 22-23)

#### *Lighting the way*

Edmonton artist Memi Von Gaza became Senior Resident Designer at Winter Light, exuberantly exploring core artistic themes through a series of innovative light installations, original lantern design and a contemporary take on ancient folk tales. Her brilliant, whimsical, and mysterious sculptures shone light in dazzling ways and in unexpected places - casting the spell for popular night time adventures like Baba Yaga, Big Winter, Mill Creek, and Illuminations.



### 24hrs to Ignition (Jan 21)

#### *Setting the fire*

Edmonton's arts community was front and centre in the development of Winter Light. Well-known media artist Tim Folkmann led as fire curator. He coordinated the welcome fire program, initiated the sculpture competition *24 hrs to Ignition*, and regularly presented local fire artisans and performers like Vibe Tribe. Tim directed *Rocket Sled Across the North Saskatchewan*, Winter Light's first foray into large-scale spectacle and pyro, featuring hilarious and daring performances by Fire Fly Theater. Tim also created beautiful media art works for Illuminations, Baba Yaga, and Mispon.



### Family Day (Feb 15)

#### *Celebrating an inclusive culture*

Award-winning musician and community development worker Debbie Houle led Winter Light's heritage and outreach program. Working closely with an aboriginal advisory group that included leaders and elders such as Lewis Cardinal, Brenda St. Germain, Reuben Quinn, and Mini Freeman, Debbie wove rich threads of traditional knowledge, culture and artistry into the project. A key inspiration was the region's deep tradition of welcome to 'all the peoples', which guided Debbie's role as 'Multi-Community' Outreach Liaison, bringing Winter Light into a network of individuals and organizations helping to build healthy connections in Edmonton's ever evolving society.



### Big Winter (Feb 26 -27)

#### *Exploring neighbourhoods*

Big Winter, a special winter festival in Mill Woods, delighted local residents with a mini-adventure walk featuring woodland dioramas by Memi Von Gaza and a high energy concert from local indy-folk musicians the Low Flying Planes.

### Star Party (Mar 6)

#### *Celebrating the winter sky*

Star Party Coordinator Sherrilyn Jahrig's remarkable collaboration between the Royal Astronomical Society, Elk Island National Park, Winter Light and the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve offered a spectacular winter experience. Set in the snowy landscape of Astotin Lake, the timeless brilliance of the stars was celebrated with astronomy and science, traditional ceremony and knowledge, and magical light installations. The event drew international attention from the Astronomical Union Conference in Arizona, Travel Alberta in Korea, National Geographic, Canadian Geographic, Nahanni National Park, Banff National Park and Jasper National Park. 6000 people from across the region and as far north as Nunavut gathered to experience the vast natural wonder of northern landscape and sky.

**Love Love Love! I've had a blast tonight.  
You've brightened up my night.**

- Karla Culler, Vancouver



# 2011

## PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS

### WINTER LIGHT TIMELINE

**Flashpoint** (Jan 22)

**Illuminations** (Jan 29)

**Common Ground** (Feb 4 – 5)

**Meltdown** (Feb 11)

**Mill Creek Adventure Walk** (Feb 25 – 26)

**Family Day** (Feb 21)

**Star Party** (Mar 5)

### Flashpoint (Jan 22)

#### *Ice and Snow, Art and Sport*

Expanding the creative capacity for winter recreation was a central thesis for Winter Light. In partnership with Edmonton ski operators, programmers devised innovative ways to integrate arts, recreation and spectacle. Adventure trails, sport photography competition, historic display, the world's longest dragon slide sculpture by Ryan Winspinski, and interactive media art by Will Bauer offered fascinating interpretations of Edmonton's unique ski hill culture.



### Illuminations (Jan 29)

#### *A spectacular winter circus*

Winter Light's flagship event was an integrated installation of contemporary performance, media art, music, and design, featuring a large scale pyro spectacle with guest artist Circus Orange. The intricate collaboration included light design by Matt Vest, an interactive sound score by Aaron Macri, contemporary choir music led by local composer and conductor Jordan Van Beirt, traditional dance by Leo Letendre, roving performance led by Darrin Hagen and Linda Karenko, and the brilliant 'building as light box' installation by acclaimed media artist Lindsay McIntyre.



**"a glorious night of urban street theatre, both avant-garde and accessible, an aesthetic spectacular."**

- The Edmonton Journal

### Common Ground (Feb 4 – 5)

#### *A joyous Winter Village*

Festivals weaving together 'multiple-communities' was one of Winter Light's most rewarding and successful areas of development. Strong cultural partners like Sun & Moon Aboriginal Arts Society, community leaders from every culture, and a robust arts outreach program brought together dancers, poets, visual artists, drummers, story tellers, knowledge keepers and performers emerging from the rich immigrant cultures of Africa, Europe, and Asia. Common Ground featured a gorgeous installation of 7 heritage shelters – a temporary village hosting more than 75 artists and heritage interpreters. Blessings and ceremonies, gorgeous light design and site installation, original play activities, family fun and a free multi-ethnic feast brought joy and energy to an extraordinary celebration of community spirit.



### Meltdown (Feb 11)

#### *Partners in winter life*

Community enterprise generated new winter events with a wide array of partners, community organizations and collaborators, including Meltdown, a media and music infused indoor-outdoor party hosted by the Jubilee Auditorium.



### Mill Creek Adventure Walk (Feb 25 – 26)

#### *Everyone loves a parade*

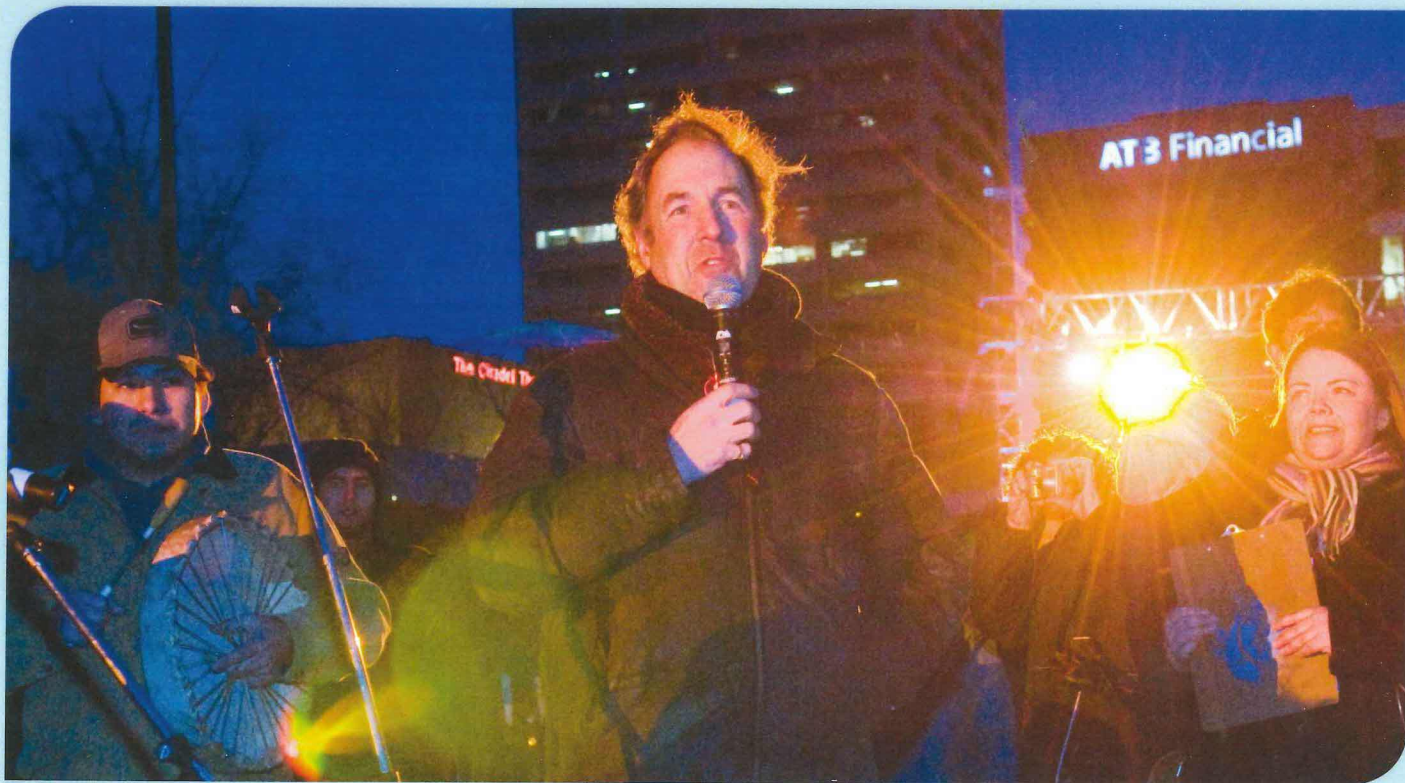
Already active as an emerging artist Dylan Toy-maker became a leading and inspired interpreter of the project's main theme: light. He was instrumental in developing Winter Light's sustainable technical capacity, a commissioned designer for lantern and light installations, and an invaluable contributor to site and community development. His dazzling exhibitions became a signature aesthetic component of Winter Light, and a magical element for the audience. Audio artists Aaron Macri and Dave Clarke provided a surprising sonic experience. A community lantern parade became a mile long trail of light woven through the night.





# FUELLED

## BY A VIBRANT COMMUNITY SPIRIT



**FUELLED** by issues arising from Council's winter city portfolio, Winter Light was conceived as a project of community-based cultural development.

The project was led by a team of artists who reflected a cross-section of culture backgrounds and interests, and who embraced the mandate to engage a broad range of individuals, organizations and groups in the project. An extensive and on-going consultation process was initiated, intended to root Winter Light in a strong network of community stakeholders, to develop informed dialogue, and to reflect the depth and diversity of Edmonton's civic character.

Festivals are a deeply valued characteristic of Edmonton's identity, generating pride, a sense of ownership, and enthusiastic participation. Fostering the winter agenda through festivals offered the City an opportunity to build upon the reputation, programming and production capacity of a strong festival community. From the outset, Winter Light established active links with the existing winter festivals, Ice on Whyte, Deep Freeze and Silver Skate, collaborated on direct and indirect program development and promotion.

Winter Light was also engaged by the City of Edmonton to refresh their Family Day celebrations and the event quickly became an integral part of Winter Light's community engagement goals. Led by Debbie Houle and Bob Rasko, exciting community art, multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural programs were developed, offering fresh ideas, celebration and discovery around the idea of individual and civic family.

One of the most effective forms of community engagement undertaken by Winter Light was the creation of 'advisory circles'. These advisory groups opened up previously unanticipated areas of leadership, programming and artistic excellence, stimulated cultural education, and created exciting opportunities within the Winter Light group. Artists and cultural workers from a wide variety of ethnic groups, cultural backgrounds, and nationalities engaged with Winter Light. The outcome was original program development that filtered throughout Winter Light events such as Family Day Global Village, Hearts of Fire, Aboriginal Camp, Family Day Flag Project, and the flagship multi-community, multi-cultural event, Common Ground.

Recreation is at the heart of positive winter experience. Winter Light developed close programming affiliations with the Edmonton Ski Club and Snow Valley, resulting in some of the most successful activities of the project, including the Baba Yaga Trail Adventure and Flashpoint. Playdays Canada and River Valley Programs also became contributors of unique programming, animating a spirit of play and adventure for all ages.

The central mandate of the project – celebrating Edmonton's winter spirit – shone brightly on an international stage during the Olympic Torch Relay, when Winter Light provided colourful and lively symbols of Edmonton's winter culture and heritage.



