

# Two Chamber of Commerce 2016 Award winners tell their stories

by Gloria Welton

Companies and individuals were recently recognized by the Greater Summerside Chamber of Commerce for their outstanding work.

“We believe in the business leaders who drive our community, and we want to recognize them and their employees for their incredible contributions,” says **Jane Sharpe**, Executive Director.

## 2016 People’s Choice Award went to: Spotlight Theatre Company

**Reasha Walsh** opened **Spotlight Theatre Company** about seven years ago in Summerside and now has expanded to the Carrefour Theatre in Charlottetown. The company offers theatre arts programs in acting, musical theatre, dance, improv, and visual arts.

“We offer hands-on learning experiences for all ages,” says Reasha. “Performing arts education develops performance skills and also builds confidence, creative expression, commitment, leadership, public speaking, and teamwork skills. It’s also an exciting opportunity to meet new friends and have fun.”

“With weekly classes, workshops, after school programs, summer camps, shows, and birthday parties, there are many ways to shine in the Spotlight.”

Reasha has been in the theatre industry since she was 18 years old. “I started my career by being exposed to stage managing. Normally you need post-secondary training, but I learned on the job. It is certainly the harder way, but it worked out well for me.”

She started working at the Harbourfront Theatre about 12 years ago, and she also took a year of college business studies courses. “I moved to Toronto for a few years, but then came back because I missed the quality of life here. When I came back and noticed there was no theatre school here, I saw an opportunity to open my own business.”

She has a wide range of skills which helped her start in business, but it has been a lot of hard work. “The business has operated as a one-woman show because I am familiar with all aspects of running a theatre school. However, as a result of growth, I hire staff on a casual basis.”

Reasha develops the curriculum for the classes and is in the process of apprenticing staff to eventually take over class instruction. “Many staff previously took the program as performers. Some have gone on to post-secondary training and have come back to work here.”

“It is so amazing to get this award and recognition because I spend a lot of time building relationships in the community. When we do big productions, we need community sponsors and partners, and they see that we just want to help make kids, youth and adults happy.”

“When you spread the love for culture around and have such a wide age range, it draws in kids, families, businesses and the community as a whole.”



**Reasha Walsh, Owner and Operator.**

## Future business plans

Because the work load is steadily increasing, Reasha says she will be looking into hiring a part-time bookkeeper in the New Year.

“By next spring, we plan to offer a basic technical program for ages 16 and older. The program will teach basic theatre lighting, sound, and stage management skills.”

Reasha says the students of this program will handle the technical aspects of the school’s live performances.

“The students will get a good look at the technical side of the industry and decide if they want to take further education and pursue a career.”

For more information, contact **Reasha Walsh**, Owner and Operator of **Spotlight Theatre Company**, at 902-303-2780.

Visit [www.spotlighttheatrecompany.com](http://www.spotlighttheatrecompany.com)



## 2016 Employee of the Year went to: Carol Gaudet

**Carol Gaudet** is not thinking about retirement because she loves her job, the daily routine, and the people she works with. “The years have gone by so fast since I started with this company at the age of 16, and it is so great to get this award,” says Carol.

She comes from a very large family of 24 children from Tignish, and at a young age was expected to work to help support the family. Many of her siblings also worked at **PEI Bag Company**. She and her husband live in Summerside and have six children.

“At one time, this company employed 14 sewers, but because of changes in technology and the type of material used, we have just two now.”

The company has many long-term employees. “Another sewer retired this year after 47 years,” says Carol. “The company offers great benefits, such as medical and pension plans, and they treat me well. I could retire if I wanted to, but I like getting out each day and coming to work.”

Her hours are 6 am until 2 pm, Monday to Friday. “I like getting up early, and hard work doesn’t bother me. Coming to work gives me more energy.”

**Thane Smallwood**, General Manager, says Carol is a tremendous role model, because she always has been a loyal, dedicated, and reliable worker. “She loves coming to work every day and does so with an attitude we should bottle and sell.”

For more information about the **PEI Bag Company**, visit [www.peibag.com](http://www.peibag.com)



**Carol Gaudet**, a full-time Sewer for PEI Bag Co., has worked there for 54 years.



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