

ARTS & LIFE

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From New York City to Qualicum Beach

Illana Hester is the new face of TOSH

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Illana Hester's love for art has led her from New York City to Qualicum Beach.

The Old School House Art Centre's new executive director is handling the transition with grace, ease and enthusiasm.

Just over a month into her role, 35-year-old Illana Hester is embracing every aspect of living in Qualicum Beach.

When she speaks, her words convey a deep sense of understanding of place, and the role she has to fill.

"Our mandate is to support arts and artists in the region, and Vancouver Island, and B.C.," said Hester. "I want to make sure everything I do promotes that and pushes towards that."

Hester grew up in Calgary, then headed west for an undergraduate degree at UBC. After that, she went to New York University, where she ended up obtaining a Master's of Arts in Visual Arts Administration.

She worked in New York for 12 years in a variety of roles, from multimillion-dollar art conservation to freelance art consulting, gaining extensive experience in the upper echelons of the art administration world.

Although she loved New York, living in a city of 10 million people with a small child was starting to take its toll.

"When I was younger, it was invigorating. It was so exciting," said Hester.

But the realities of paying through



Illana Hester's first day at The Old School House Art Centre in Qualicum Beach was April 29.

EMILY VANCE PHOTO

the nose for rent and health care were daunting.

"I was living in a third-floor walk-up with no bathtub and no washer-dryer. What am I doing?"

She found the posting for the position online, and thought, "why not?"

Hester replaces Corinne James, executive director of TOSH for 17 years. She realizes those are big shoes to fill.

"I really feel like I got a thoroughbred business handed to me. And

not like, a donkey," Hester said with a laugh. "All the systems that are in place, all the success that TOSH has had, is really paramount to her. Really, she should be lauded and highlighted, because she was such an asset."

The two trained together for a month, and got to know each other well.

"[She's] such a nice person, and so caring, and so thoughtful... but also very pragmatic. I know she will

be very missed by everybody here, because she was just so amazing," said Hester.

Hester is also quick to mention how awestruck she is by the strength of TOSH's volunteer community.

"So many of my volunteers used to be CEOs, and EAs, and CFOs. ... and now they've retired, they have a lot of information, and they bring it here," said Hester. "I listen to my volunteers and I'm like 'that's amazing! Cool, yes, let's do that!'"

She's also thankful for the work done by TOSH's board of directors.

"They are an incredible group of people," said Hester. "They're all really open and forward thinking. They want what I want, which is TOSH to be here forever. Not for the next 30 years, but the next 60 years. The next hundred years."

In those years to come, her vision is to keep the space a vibrant hub for the arts, open to those of all ages and abilities.

"Things that I think are important are inter-generational community. I think there's something to be said about the emotional safety and emotional stability that inter-generational community provides. For both the youngest, the middle, and the oldest parts of the generation," said Hester.

"I also want to open TOSH up a little bit more to our under-served populations. I really think that it's our job as people working in the public realm to support those who are the least seen in society and who have the most difficulty."

For her, inclusion is one of the most important aspects of a thriving non-profit.

"I just want to make sure everybody feels welcome here. Every generation feels welcome here, every type of person feels welcome here, everyone feels like they can have access to seeing the art, to visiting," said Hester.

As for her thoughts on living in Qualicum Beach, one month in?

"I find it really refreshing. It feels good to belong somewhere. And to really put down roots, and to really say, I love this place and I want it to succeed and be the best it can. And just work towards that."

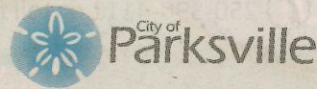
COMING TUESDAY: A profile of former TOSH director Corinne James

Memories on Memorial Walkshops

Saturday, June 22 – 10.30 am or 12.30 pm

Memorial Avenue Streetscape and Utility Upgrades Project

Join one of our guided *Memories on Memorial Walkshops* which will share the history of the street, discuss assessment of the trees and consider possible streetscape designs. Accessible walking tours begin and finish at McMillan Arts Centre. As well, please participate in our online survey at www.survey.memorialave.ca until July 3.



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