Apsley Autumn Studio Tour

The Apsley Autumn Studio Tour – Request for Financial Support

In 1994, I was one of four artists looking for a way to give art a significant presence in North Kawartha. The Apsley Autumn Studio Tour was the result. Now entering its 34th year, the tour has become an established and well-recognized event in our community, renowned for the quality of its artists working in a variety of styles and disciplines. We have grown from an original group of 12 artists to almost three times that number in any given year.

Over the years, we have seen visitor numbers fluctuate from one year to the next, but the tour consistently attracts more than 500 visitors over the weekend. Importantly, many of those visitors also support local businesses, including restaurants, shops and other services throughout the area.

Many are cottagers who extend their season to include tour weekend, while others are visitors from outside the area. We have welcomed people from Ottawa, the Niagara Region and much further afield. Some visitors to my own studio have had no previous connection to North Kawartha. They discovered us through our advertising or by picking up a tour brochure while travelling. For them, the Studio Tour was their introduction to our community.

This speaks to something larger than an annual arts event. Art and culture contribute immeasurably to the vitality and attractiveness of a community. They help create places where people want to visit, relocate, raise families and establish businesses. Arts and cultural events also strengthen community connections and contribute to a sense of identity and belonging. Research has consistently demonstrated that arts and culture, particularly in rural communities, can play an important role in tourism and economic development.

Over the past 33 years, the tour has been financially sustained through artist memberships and business sponsorships. However, since COVID, sponsorship revenue has steadily declined. In the current economic climate, we are increasingly reluctant to place additional demands on the local businesses that have generously supported us year after year. We recognize that many of those businesses are facing their own financial pressures.

As a result, for the 2026 tour, we were forced to significantly reduce our advertising budget. We did not place radio advertisements and reduced our print advertising. Instead, we concentrated our resources on our trifold brochure, Toureka – an app dedicated to promoting and mapping studio tours and other arts events – and our highly visible highway billboards.

Despite maintaining a comprehensive website and a strong social media presence, the reduction in advertising contributed to lower attendance in 2026 than in previous years. Fewer visitors to the tour also meant fewer customers for local restaurants and businesses. This is an important connection: when the tour attracts visitors, the benefits extend well beyond the artists themselves.

Historically, North Kawartha Township has been supportive of our efforts. In 1994, the Township provided funding to help print our first tour brochure. Since then, we have rarely needed to request financial assistance, although the Township has continued to support us in other important ways, including installing our pole banners and the large promotional banner at the southern entrance to the village. We are genuinely grateful for that ongoing support.

Today, we are asking North Kawartha Township to recognize the Apsley Autumn Studio Tour not only as a cultural event, but also as a contributor to local tourism, business activity and community vitality.

For 2027, we are requesting $3,000 in financial support, with the hope that the Township will consider establishing an ongoing annual contribution as part of its budget.

This funding would allow us to expand our advertising reach and bring more visitors into North Kawartha. Specifically, it would help fund:

- Additional highway billboards and solar lighting to improve their visibility.
- Print advertising in lake yearbooks and other regional publications.
- Radio advertising to reach a broader audience.
- Targeted social media advertising to attract visitors from outside our immediate area.

We believe the Apsley Autumn Studio Tour is an important part of what makes North Kawartha a destination, not just a place to live or cottage. With the Township's continued support, we can build on more than three decades of success, attract new visitors and generate economic and cultural benefits for the entire community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly Moldovan