

Media, art a winning combination

The North of Nowhere Expo isn't your ordinary festival.

Produced by the Edmonton Small Press Association (ESPA), the Expo is a multi-disciplinary, activist-arts festival that celebrates independent media and underground art.

Taking place at the Stanley A. Milner Library and Metro Cinema, the Expo runs from Friday until Oct. 31 and features several core programming themes and special events.

"We are an independent and activist arts media organization, so everything we do is political," says Lynette Bondarchuk, ESPA's artistic director and programmer.

The Expo is offering a number of award-winning documentaries that explore topics like food security, prison justice and media democracy, along with a literary fair showcasing local publications, and a workshop by the Beehive Collective to discuss the effects of colonialism, corporate globalization and more.

Bondarchuk hopes the Expo not only raises awareness about these complex social issues, but also inspires and

motivates people to take action.

"The Expo gives us a good opportunity to connect with other people, instead of preaching to the converted," she says.

"We really want to go outside our own community, because what's the point if we're not opening people's eyes?"

In an effort to remain inclusive and accessible to all, Bondarchuk emphasizes that anyone can attend the Expo.

"No one will be turned away for lack of funds," she explains. "We only charge a suggested donation of eight to \$12, if people can afford it."

The money earned at the Expo is used to offset production costs, and ensures the Expo continues to operate.

Bondarchuk admits it's no easy feat running the Expo and ESPA's other initiatives, like publishing the street vendor newspaper *Our Voice* on a few grants and volunteer power.

"It's totally a struggle," she says, adding



Expo offers a unique experience for all

that the organization is always in need of volunteers, especially office volunteers.

"We maintain a huge collection of artist books and art. We have some really unique things that are really representative of our culture, but because we don't have enough office volunteers, people have to make appointments to view the collection," she says.

"We also have many other positions for volunteers. They can help out with exhibits, tabling events, helping us publish the newspaper and distributing back issues. We're flexible and people will be provided training."

Bondarchuk hopes Edmontonians come and check what the Expo has to offer.

"It's about active citizenship. People need to understand that you can be kept in the dark about things. And, there's good

artwork. It's accessible and it's artwork that people will get," she adds. "We really hope people come and see what's out there."

The North of Nowhere Expo runs until the end of the month. Tickets can be purchased at the door. To learn more about the event or the Edmonton Small Press Association, visit www.edmontonsmallpress.ca, email contact@edmontonsmallpress.org or call 780-434-9236.

Look to this space to see the work that the city's volunteers and non-profit organizations are carrying out and what it is that Volunteer Edmonton is involved in. For more information or suggestions for story ideas please contact Evelyn Pham, communications co-ordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call (780) 732-6655 or check out our website at www.volunteeredmonton.com.

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