



The History of PAL Canada

The year 1983 was not the precise year the PAL idea started coming to fruition. For many years, members of the Arts Community had decried the lack of care and support facilities for older members at a stage in their lives when these became increasingly necessary. However, momentum seemed to increase around this time, and there was a crescendo of voices asking for serious investigation into the treatment of senior artists: professionals who had given their lives to the Arts. Usually their dedication was met with insufficient recompense to enable them to live out their remaining years amongst like-minded people, in their own milieu, with available health facilities and a modicum of physical and financial security.

A professional theatre company in Toronto, The Smile Theatre Company, commented on the growing number of older performing artists living in circumstances that were sometimes heart-breaking; unable to keep their homes (if they had been able to accumulate one while in the finicky market of Canadian Culture), ending their days in an institution ill-suited and ill-prepared for the sometimes difficult characteristics of the older artist. In such an atmosphere, alienated from “their old buddies”, living in a place where few, if any, knew their background and out of touch with colleagues in similar situations. These artists were unhappy to say the least.

Since The Smile Company’s mandate was to entertain senior citizens in Toronto’s large number of commercially available “old folks homes”, as they were then called, they often came across former performers who ended up there since there was no other place else to go. They noticed how most were leading unhappy, non-productive lives amongst those who neither understood nor much cared about their previous artistic life. However, as most of the artists had originated in other parts of Canada (or the world), family was usually not available and colleagues had to take whatever accommodation was available and affordable. There was no gathering place for older members of the professional Arts community.

Two members of the Smile Board, Peter McConnell and Brian Robinson, discussed the possibility with Roy Wordsworth in 1983 and the idea often came up for discussion before the Boards of artistic organizations, and certainly amongst artists of all stripes who recognized the necessity and timeliness of somehow obtaining affordable accommodation specifically for older members of the artistic community. However it took the push of an experience closer to home to force action and commitment.

A long-time member of The Smile Company, well-know and highly successful entertainer, George Murray, began suffering age and health problems -not severe enough to allow for prolonged care or hospitalization, but sufficient to prevent him from working consistently. Thus, this “Canadian Star” was left to his melancholy existence in a tiny flat, isolated from his colleagues. Members of the Company helped in any way they could but it became

apparent that Murray needed more and better-organized care, which was beyond the capabilities of his striving friends. Eventually it was decided George ought to return to his remaining family, then living in Victoria, which he did. Despite being with “kith ‘n’ kin” George found little to talk about with his family, loving and caring as they were. There was no one with whom George could “talk shop”; no one with whom he could, in the words of the late Barbara Hamilton in another context, “trade lies about all the work they had coming up.” Cut off from his artist friends, and unhappy despite the support of his family, he died shortly thereafter.

Those caring Smile Company members were shaken by George’s fate, realizing all too clearly that there were many more “Georges” within the Arts Community and something must be done to address the situation.

In 1984, Patty Gail (Patty Gail Peaker) became President of The Smile Company Board of Directors, and, according to Peter McConnell, “... circuitous discussion turned to thrust.”

On the evening of 5 January, 1985, Patty Gail gathered the Board together for a meeting in her living room. Before the night was out, along with other luminaries such as Roy Wordsworth, Robert Christie, then Artistic Director of The Smile Company; Barry Morse, renowned actor; Peter McConnell, Smile Company’s Founding Artistic Director; Brian Robinson, it’s Co-founder and former Managing Director; Sandy Webster, President of Canadian Actors’ Equity; and Billy O’Connor, well-known band leader, along with fellow Smile Company Board of Directors members Syme Jago, Peter Lavender, Sid Young and Robert Peaker, Patty Gail had set in motion a Steering Committee which, in jig-time, would lay the solid foundations of this incredible organization now known as PAL Canada® Foundation Inc. PAL would gather momentum, drive and support from the Artistic Community and beyond.

From its incorporation, through its conducting of studies regarding needs and feasibility with seed money provided by our Founding Organizations, and with the fortuitous involvement of the brilliant architect, Vas Kuchar, these steps led to the opening of the first lodge, Pal Place in Toronto. Subsequently, it has spread its amazing concepts out towards the ends of Canada through the establishment of local Chapters.

1985 - Ad Hoc Committee formed

On the evening of 5 January, 1985, Board President, Patty Gail, gathered the Board of Director of The Smile Company together for a meeting in her living room. Before the night was out, along with other luminaries such as Roy Wordsworth, Robert Christie, then Artistic Director of The Smile Company; Barry Morse, renowned actor; Peter McConnell, Smile Company’s Founding Artistic Director; Brian Robinson, its Co-founder and former Managing Director; Sandy Webster, President of Canadian Actors’ Equity; and Billy O’Connor, well-known band leader, along with fellow Smile Company Board of Directors members Syme Jago, Peter Lavender, Sid Young and Robert Peaker, President Patty Gail had set in motion a Steering Committee which, in jig-time, would lay the solid foundations of this incredible organization now known as PAL Canada® Foundation .. PAL would gather momentum, drive and support from the Artistic Community and beyond.

Despite some tricky moments, some overwork and fatigue by incredibly dedicated people, some doubts, disappointments and disillusion in the ensuing months, on the 5th of September, 1986, PAL was incorporated as Performing Arts Lodges of Canada. There is some confusion regarding the appearance of the name Performing Arts Lodges (Ontario) Inc., around the same time. Although a consistent record doesn’t exist, it appears the reference to “Ontario” was inserted in the name to address concerns that, in order to approach the provincial government for funding it might be necessary to let the politicians know that the money would be used for construction of a facility in Ontario. At

the same time, since PAL was federally incorporated and funding was also being sought federally, it should be apparent to federal politicians that this was a national project, intended to serve all of Canada eventually.

While the “provincial” designation was used off and on, the organization was usually referred to as Performing Arts Lodges of Canada and funds from bodies such as Equity, ACTRA and Actra Fraternal Benefit Society (AFBS) were funds donated on behalf of national memberships.

1985 - Questionnaire Circulated

It was decided the first major step should be an investigation of what kind and extent of facilities would be needed. It would be critical to reach as many members of professional arts groups as possible, and determine their present and near-future needs. However, some response would also be necessary to assist in learning how many of those who might need such services and accommodation that PAL might provide would likely take advantage of these services and accommodations. In other words, how many would move into a building if one were to be provided? How many individuals needed the provision of services now, or will in the near future, and what is the extent of these needed services?

The most efficient and non-invasive method of reaching the “clientele” earmarked by PAL was, certainly initially, to work with professional organizations to take advantage of their membership mailing lists. Our Founding Organizations also seemed the obvious ones to approach first to raise money for such an extensive, national survey.

Canadian Actors’ Equity Association (CAEA) immediately promised \$5,000 to underwrite a “needs survey”, providing The Alliance of Canadian Cinema Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) and American Federation of Musicians in the United States and Canada (AFofM, Local 149 Toronto) did likewise. The funding was gathered and the needs assessment survey was launched.

1986 - Founding Organizations

The three largest and most influential professional performer organizations initially supported PAL and without their endorsement we might well not be in the successful situation we are today. During the initial organization of PAL, these organizations were granted status on the Board of PAL as Ex-officio Members of the Board of Directors. They still maintain that status and still support the work of PAL throughout Canada on behalf of their members.

These original Ex-officio Members are: Alliance of Canadian Cinema Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), American Federation of Musicians in the United States and Canada (AFofM Local 149, Toronto) and Canadian Actors’ Equity Association (CAEA). ACTRA is a union with a history of almost six decades representing well over 20,000 professional performers working in the electronic arts in Canada. It has a long list of accomplishments creating and protecting Canadian Culture in film, television, radio and other electronic performing industries including new-age pursuits.

Local 149 of AFofM is the Toronto Local of the American Federation of Musicians in the United States and Canada. Its history is the story of the music successes, in all forms, and is one of the strongest Locals internationally.

CAEA was formed, in 1976, when the Canadian section of the American stage union, Actors’ Equity Association, separated from the international union to form its own voice and presence in the cultural life of

Canadians. Initially containing actors, singers, dancers and directors, it continues to expand into every area of live, stage performance. Its significance in the lives of performers and audiences alike is immense.

Initially, The Actors' Fund of Canada (The Actors' Fund) was reluctant to join with PAL, fearing such a creation might weaken the ability to successfully carry out the performer assistance programmes -the raison d'être of "the Fund". After all, it appeared that PAL would be involved in the same work as the Actors' Fund and be competing in the same market for the same financial funding. After these fears were allayed, however, the Actors' Fund accepted an invitation to sit on PAL's Board of Directors and their representative was added to the number of Ex-officio Members.

1986 - Performing Arts Lodges of Canada founded

PAL Canada® was founded as a national, charitable organization on 5 September, 1986. Its Objects of Incorporation included the provision of "residential accommodation for aged, poor or disabled persons who have rendered services in or to the performing arts in Canada" and to accomplish this by researching "the present and future needs of accommodation for members of the performing arts community in Canada, including...support facilities that may be required...to acquire, construct, operate, maintain, lease or dispose of residential accommodation and ancillary facilities." From its incorporation, through its conducting of studies regarding needs and feasibility with seed money provided by our Founding Organizations, and with the fortuitous involvement of the brilliant architect, Vas Kuchar, these steps led to the opening of the first lodge, Pal Place in Toronto, and its thrust out towards the ends of Canada through the establishment of local Chapters, this amazing idea has not been abandoned.

We have many to thank for its initial success, and certainly its first Board of Directors:

1. Roy Wordsworth President
2. Patty Gail Vice-president
3. Secretary-Treasurer Peggy Mahon
4. Executive Director Sid Young
10. Legal Council Norman Griesdorf, Q.C.

Members of the Board of Directors

Barbara Hamilton, Patricia Carroll Brown, Jeanie Hersenhoren, Desmond Scott, Peter McConnell (Advisory), Don Cullen, Rosemary Galloway, Melanie Morse, Barry Morse (Advisory)

Ex-officio Members

Angela Fusco - President, Canadian Actors' Equity Association (CAEA)
Gino Morocco - President, Alliance of Canadian Cinema Television and Radio (ACTRA)
Alan Wood - President, American Federation of Musicians in the United States and Canada (Local 149 Toronto)
Araby Lockhart - President, Actors' Fund of Canada
Legal Council - Norman Griesdorf, Q.C.

1999 - Tom Patterson works to establish a PAL Chapter in Stratford

Life-long Arts supporter extraordinaire, Herbert Whittaker, Critic Emeritus of Toronto's Globe & Mail newspaper and Founding Chairman of Theatre Museum Canada, suggested to Stratford Festival Founder, Tom Patterson, that there should be a PAL presence in the Festival City. Patterson, along with old friends Mary Jolliffe and then PAL President, Dan MacDonald, and Past-president, Roy Wordsworth, travelled to a meeting of interested people there. The enthusiasm was immediate and, obviously, lasting. A Steering Committee was formed chaired by Robert Ihrig. Being close to Toronto, many visits were possible and the Stratford group's participation in the PAL organization became increasingly more mutually beneficial.

Much was contributed, by Stratford representatives, to the drafting of our Chapter Agreement, which lays out the relationship between the national organization, PAL Canada®, and its Chapters. By signing the Agreement, in 2002, the Stratford group became the first official Chapter of PAL Canada®. This action spurred the almost immediate signing on by PAL Vancouver and became a template for those that followed. Relations were established between the new organization and the Stratford Festival which have continued to grow over the years, particularly with regard to the annual fundraiser Expect the Extraordinary which has seen the event increasing in popularity each year. Expect the Extraordinary realized considerable funds which are put to use to provide services to those residing in the PAL Stratford area.

History of PAL Canada®