

# The Chatham Daily News

## Exciting 'App'ortunity for audio play producer

**It all started with e-mail from BlackBerry contact**

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Chatham's David Farquhar has a new, North American-wide audience for the audio theatre productions he's produced thanks to the BlackBerry smartphone.

The executive producer of Voices In The Wind Audio Theatre said he received an e-mail "out of the blue" from a contact he had at BlackBerry in Waterloo asking him: "Have you ever considered putting up your audio dramas on our new podcasts app?"

Farquhar said he thought: "Sure, why not, if it's going to give me exposure."

He went to work creating the podcast program Moonlight Audio Theatre, which was launched just prior to Christmas 2010 as part of BlackBerry Podcasts App, featured on the smartphone.

Farquhar said there was some scrambling involved to get more content to add to the productions created by Voices In The Wind Audio Theatre.

"That's really when Moonlight Audio Theatre came about," he said.

At last count, the Chatham-based podcast program offers 46 audio plays, including five local productions.

The popularity of the podcasts took off faster than expected, Farquhar said, noting there have been 110,000 downloads from Moonlight Audio Theatre since it was launched.

"We thought if we got 10,000 (downloads) in the first month, we would be doing really well," he said, adding there were 11,000 downloads last week alone.

Noting he had done "zilch" to promote the podcasts, Farquhar said the interest is being driven by social media.

While the downloads are free, he said the growing popularity of audio theatre, which can be listened to on airplanes, bus rides and long trips, could create some sponsorship opportunities in the future.

On Friday, he got word that the Blackberry Podcasts App will also be pre-installed on Blackberry's new Play Books, which is the company's answer to the iPad.

Another pleasant surprise for Farquhar has been the popularity of a local audio play he produced about a decade ago, titled Every Now and Then, which has consistently been one of the top 10 shows downloaded on the app.

Not only is the BlackBerry Podcasts App providing a new audience for these productions, Farquhar said,

"it's a younger audience. To me, it's a perfect match of technology in the delivery system with an old format . . . but now it's been re-invented."

This has also been an unexpected thrill for amateur actors who have had roles in Voices In The Wind productions.

Michael Dick, who recently did the voice of Ebenezer Scrooge in a local audio production of A Christmas Carol, said, "it's awe-inspiring. I had no idea how many people have an opportunity to listen to this, until recently."

A veteran of the local acting group, Theatre Kent, Dick said, "it's so different from being on stage, the whole idea of speaking into a microphone versus being on stage live . . . yet both are so rewarding and this is just like a bonus."

Pat Gough, also a veteran of local stage productions, said, "I love it.

She added, "it's a very natural progression in a lot of ways."

Gough said most people learn the craft of acting on the stage and "now this seems to be a transition into the audio dramas."

Audio theatre also enables a much faster turnaround for plays.

Dick said when working on A Christmas Carol, they did a run-through of the play on Friday night, then came back to record it on Saturday.

"It's very exciting and it's a lot less strenuous, for us as actors," Gough said.

Although audio theatre doesn't give actors the benefits of props and body language to convey a message to the audience, she said, "it's a great deal more creative in that you are creating that world with your voice."

Dick said your voice is your tool and "when you get it right it just feels so good."

Farquhar is looking at how to capitalize on the popularity of Every Now and Then.

The said play would be ideal to convert into a series, because the story is about an antiques dealer who sells merchandise that takes the new owner on a mystical journey, such as buying a deck chair from the Titanic.

The story lines are limitless and would provide plenty of opportunities for local actors to play roles, Farquhar said.

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