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Jan. 12, 2013

When a fire tore through the Kitchener-Waterloo Little Theatre's home on July 19, 2002, those associated with the community theatre group promised the show would go on.

But the volunteer organization has had its struggles in the decade since their home of more than 70 years was destroyed by fire. A new building is in place at 9 Princess St. E., but it took longer than expected to finally open its doors in 2009, and K-W Little Theatre had to forgo other necessities like proper signage for its new home.

That prompted Carrie McNabb, the treasurer of the theatre group, to try a novel way of raising the theatre's profile. She decided to enter a Facebook contest called Love our Local Business organized by Intuit – producer of tax software QuickBooks and Quicken – and offer up her Christmas wish for KWLT.

She asked for a new street sign so people passing by could better see KWLT's new home, and hopefully generate more foot traffic and have more people stop in for one of their many productions.

"I'm an accountant by trade and I follow QuickBooks because it's a solution I use both professionally and for KWLT," said McNabb. "I saw a random Facebook post for this contest and I thought it was really, really interesting. It was kind of a shot in the dark, but I thought it would be a really great opportunity if we could get it."

The prize was \$5,000 and it required her to post her pitch online and hope enough voters from Intuit's online community would vote for KWLT's Christmas wish.

“I wrote a really quick blurb, and didn’t even put up a photo even though a lot of the

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comments like, ‘Oh we didn’t realize that you were here, or we just thought this was an abandoned building,’ which is really not nice to hear when you’re so dependent on foot traffic.

“It was a great opportunity and we’ve already started moving forward with the design and construction and we hope to have a new sign up before summer.” It’s exactly what the contest was meant to do – help local small businesses said Sheryl Johnson, head of Intuit Canada’s small business division.

“The Love our Local Business program is a great way to celebrate small business success, and to thank hardworking entrepreneurs for the amazing contributions they make to our communities and our economy,” said Johnson.

“The Kitchener-Waterloo Little Theatre is a perfect example of a small but determined group of people making a huge difference in the community. We’re proud to be able to help them continue their success.”

KWLT’s next production is Macbeth, directed by Jonathan C. Dietrich, and opens Jan. 24. McNabb said they hope to have the new sign up in time for their production of the Pulitzer prize-winning play Proof, set to open April 11. Auditions for the show start Feb. 11.

“We’re hoping to get a lot of attention for that and we’re keeping our fingers crossed,” said McNabb. “We want to see the theatre succeed, and this will really help us be competitive with our other competition that has those kinds of things like branding and signs and things like that. We’ve got a great location in uptown Waterloo, and a lot of foot traffic in the neighbourhood, so we’re really trying to capitalize on some of that.”

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