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## MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

### **Six Degrees Muskoka – Survey Says Muskoka needs initiatives supporting arts and youth**

**Bracebridge, ON** – The people have spoken. Muskoka needs more initiatives supporting the arts community and its youth, according to a survey released in the wake of the successful Six Degrees Muskoka pilot project.

The Six Degrees Muskoka initiative, a street-front not-for-profit pilot project supporting Muskoka's youth, arts and wider communities, ran in downtown Bracebridge from June to mid-September. In addition to being an arts hub with seven themed art shows and 10 special events, Six Degrees Muskoka's Pixels on the Parallel provided affordable digital animation classes for kids aged 6 to 17 and hosted a reference library of works on art, architecture and culture.

"The idea was to invigorate the downtown while also giving Muskoka youth and its artists--and especially emerging artists--opportunities they would not otherwise have had," said Six Degrees co-founder Don Skinner, a local architect who, along with his wife Jenifer, own five century-old buildings in downtown Bracebridge. "It was a heck of a summer. We had 250 kids, 150 artists and arts groups and probably thousands of visitors through here over a relatively short period of time. We wanted to know what people thought in the wake of it all."

Close to 120 people participated in the wide-ranging feedback survey, available online from mid-September to early October. Highlights include;

- The majority of respondents said Muskoka is in need of opportunities such as those provided by six Degrees Muskoka "very much" or "quite a bit".
- Nearly 100% of respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with the digital animation classes.
- 90% of artists found participating in the initiative either "very worthwhile" or "quite worthwhile," even though only 13% found the initiative lucrative in financial terms.
- 70% of respondents participated in the Six Degrees Muskoka initiative
- 14% of respondents made one or more purchases over the summer.
- The majority of sales were inexpensive items such as greeting cards
- Some found the art show themes confusing and the space cluttered at times
- The majority of respondents felt that Six Degrees Muskoka had a "very positive" or "somewhat positive" effect on Muskoka's arts community, the downtown Bracebridge experience for shoppers, and other retailers in the downtown.
- 93% of respondents have recommended Six Degrees Muskoka to others.

“We received plenty of kudos for initiating and sponsoring the project, which we are always grateful for, but it wasn’t all sunshine and roses,” Skinner noted. “Some respondents offered some very frank, though always constructive, criticism. There were some great suggestions regarding timing, art show themes and the way the art was hung. A few took issue with our inclusive jurying policy. But that was a choice we made early on and we have no regrets.”

Skinner thanked the many artists, volunteers and visitors who took part in the initiative. “We received some excellent suggestions for moving forward,” he said, adding that the pilot project was a costly one, however, and that if they were to enter into a similar initiative in future they would need to find a funding model that was more self-supporting.

The site, built in 1885 as the Queen's Hotel at the corner of Manitoba Street and Taylor Road, is currently under renovation. In the interest of paying homage to that building’s rich history, Don and Jen Skinner would like to hear from you if you have old stories or pictures of the building inside or out.

The name Six Degrees Muskoka is a tip of the hat to the Six Degrees of Separation theory that all people, and by extension society’s cultural, artistic, scientific or even economic assets, are closely interrelated. Six Degrees Muskoka was developed to better equip our local community to explore and understand our commonalities and to manage our differences.

To contact the Skinners, or for more on the Six Degrees Muskoka survey, including an Executive Summary, go to [sixdegreesmuskoka.com](http://sixdegreesmuskoka.com).

Sidebar:

**Fast Facts about Six Degrees Muskoka**

250	Number of kids aged 6 to 17 who participated in digital animation classes at “Pixels on the Parallel”
90	Number of digital animation classes at “Pixels on the Parallel”
7	Number of two-week-long themed art shows
10	Number of special events, including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrospective of Kaj Pindal, NFB digital animation pioneer and <i>Peep &amp; the Big Wide World</i> creator</li> <li>• Book launches for AJ Specht’s <u>Jolo’s Two Bedrooms</u> and Wendel Messer’s <u>Verus and the Grand Assembly of Believers</u></li> <li>• Amazing Race Muskoka checkpoint, August 22, 2009</li> <li>• Architectural Conservancy of Ontario – Muskoka Chapter, AGM, October 3, 2009</li> </ul>
155	Number of artists and community groups involved in the initiative
165	Number of art demonstrations and volunteers helping out

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