



Organization	Bard on the Beach
Region	Vancouver, BC
Area of impact	Social-purpose real estate
Type of investment	Loan

Vancity's support helps establish Bard on the Beach as a leading Canadian festival

For centuries, Shakespeare's stories have captured the hearts and minds of all kinds of people. His timeless themes about the human condition are delivered through archetypal characters that everyone can relate to. They entertain and educate. For more than two decades, Bard on the Beach (Bard) has been producing Shakespeare's plays in Vanier Park, a magnificent waterfront setting near Vancouver's city centre.

Vancity has played a pivotal role in helping Bard fulfill its potential. In the early years, Vancity offered a line of credit during the off-season, and in 2001 we became a primary sponsor. Our commitment would span ten years and help establish Bard as a leading Canadian festival. Anita Cheng, Vancity Manager of Sponsorship and Community Events, explains that Vancity prefers to sponsor community and cultural events in their early stages to help these events grow and attract other sponsors, at which point we usually bow out. Bard is sponsored by several corporate sponsors.

Bard has achieved greatness. Fans are loyal and since its opening season, Bard has welcomed over one million patrons. Revenue increased from \$35,000 to almost \$4 million during the same time period; annual sales are at over 90 per cent of capacity, and plays are frequently sold out.

Recently, Bard was in danger of becoming a victim of its own success. Devoted fans were showing up in groups, taking turns in long lines to get a good seat. Increasing demand, technical deficiencies and audience discomfort were signs that Bard needed to expand.

Bard's expansion project included replacing the Mainstage Theatre with a larger, custom-built tent and creating a rain garden to resolve park drainage issues. The entire expansion project will add 400 new seats by 2013. Total estimated costs as of 2011 were over \$3 million and Bard launched the Staging Our Future capital campaign to finance the expansion. Robert Barr, Bard Managing Director, said fundraising has gone smoothly because many strong relationships were already in place. Kits Point Residents Association has been supportive of the expansion and the Vancouver Parks Board voted for it unanimously.

"There's a real understanding of what we're doing here and the value it brings to the community," says Heather Kennedy, Bard Director of Marketing. Corporate sponsors, donor members and government funds have all made this expansion possible. Funds include \$1.2 million from the Department of Canadian Heritage Cultural Spaces Fund and a \$150,000 grant from the City of Vancouver.

But funding can be unpredictable; for example, Canadian Heritage must approve receipts and reimbursement may take a long time. Bard needed a backup plan and approached Vancity "because they are our bank of choice," according to Barr. Vancity agreed to a \$600,000 term loan and line of credit increase, despite Bard's having no tangible security.

Jennifer McGinn, Vancity Account Manager, Community Business, explains. "We're always looking for ways to mitigate our risk. Bard on the Beach has been a Vancity member for over 15 years, has shown over 20 years of exceptional revenue growth, has a strong management team and the ability to raise considerable grant money and community financial support. All these factors help limit our exposure." She adds, "Although the arts may be seen as an 'extra' when compared to social housing and the environment, they

need support, too. The arts offer us a place to escape, explore and to learn. They feed and enrich us as a community on so many levels—intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.”

In 2012, the new larger tent has been constructed and there aren't any more lineups due to a new reservation system that guarantees seating. The majestic entrance dazzles theatre-goers with its castle-like appearance. Onstage, new lighting equipment have enhanced performances.

Ticket prices will remain accessible to all audiences because more will be sold, which, in turn, supports our tourism industry and ensures Bard will continue to thrive as a local economic engine. Increased demand for local actors and production experts is creating jobs, and outreach programs, from student matinee performances to workshops for students and teachers, will continue to grow.

“We are just beginning to discover all the opportunities that will come from this expansion,” states Barr. “We’re doing something right, and we want to do more of it.”