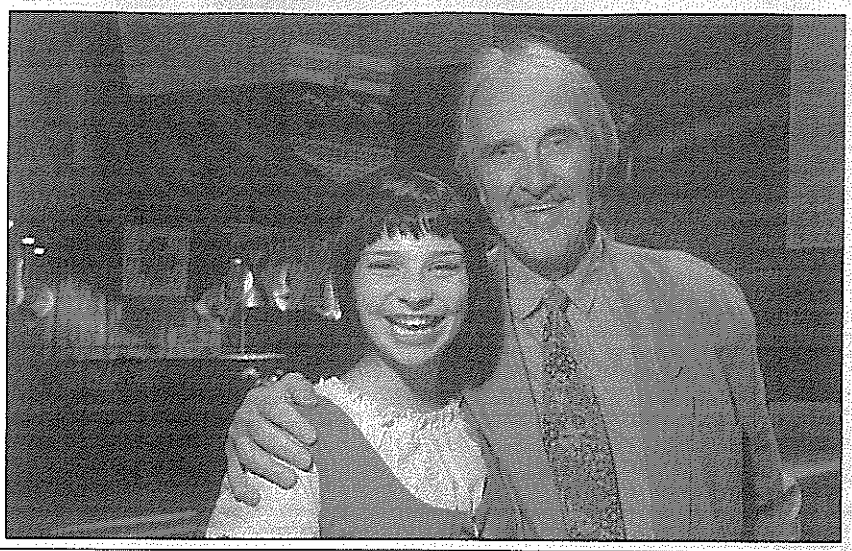

Children's entertainer Fred Penner was on hand for the 750th show at the Oh Canada Eh! dinner theatre in Canmore on Thursday (July 13), in part to support his friend Ariel Gerard. Gerard, a cast member, has sang and toured with Penner for 11 years.
Dave Stobbe – photo

Oh Canada Eh! celebrates milestone

Dave Stobbe – reporter

As Oh Canada Eh! Dinner Theatre performed its 750th show in Canmore on Thursday night (July 13), at least one Canadian celebrity was on hand to congratulate the musical theatre company.

Fred Penner, worthy himself of being epitomized in the troupe's Canadian tribute show, was in the audience enjoying the show.

"I thought it was great," said Penner.

"Congratulations and keep it up."

Penner wasn't at the show because of their milestone performance — he was there because of one of the show's performers, Ariel Gerard.

Gerard, 21, has been performing with Penner since she was nine years old, the most recent tour being last spring. Originally from Winnipeg, the singer was best friend with Penner's eldest daughter, and the two sang together with the Winnipeg Youth Choir.

Sitting with Penner after the show, Gerard says that while most kids would be playing video games or something, she would be singing and performing.

"I guess we were music nerds," said Gerard laughing.

"It was such a delight to have them perform with me," said Penner of touring with the girls.

Gerard joined up with Oh Canada Eh! for their latest season (their eighth) after working in a musical in Calgary.

The young performer loves the opportunity to do her dream job, and said she plans a career as a performer. A veteran entertainer since she was nine, she said something is missing from her life when she isn't on a stage.

As for the up-beat and well-constructed show, Penner said it is "great training ground for any actor and singer."

Penner, who has been a professional children's entertainer since 1972, said the key to longevity is to "take care of yourself." As for advice for the performers, Penner said nurturing physical, spiritual, and mental health is all part of making sure that when it comes time to perform, you are at your best. After all, he said, for a performer you don't have the option of having a sick day.

Oh Canada Eh! originally started in Niagara Falls, Ont. The theatre there was celebrating its 2,852nd show in 13 seasons the same evening.