



Shannon Litzemberger says the table transforms a lot during HOMEbody.
PHOTO: KEVIN KONNYU



In HOMEbody, the table is sometimes just a table, but it is also a bed, a raft, the province of Saskatchewan, even a symbol of hardship on the Prairies. PHOTO: KEVIN KONNYU

22 'Changemakers' will share their stories at event

HOME → A1

Yet while outmigration is part of the reality in this province, it's not the full story. Litzemberger's work of art embraces themes such as identity, belonging and place; and embodies a conversation organizers of the upcoming HOMEbody Symposium in Fredericton want to start – about creating a bright future for New Brunswick, and making the province a place people want to call home.

Taking place in the capital city on May 6, the symposium is bringing together entrepreneurs, thought-leaders, students, artists, academics, social enterprises and industry specialists in hopes of shifting the focus and changing the conversation to what can be achieved here at home.

Susan Chalmers-Gauvin, CEO of the Atlantic Ballet Theatre of Canada, is one of the event organizers. She said the theatre wanted to do something to engage the community on issues it faces – and few issues are more timely than outmigration.

"Shannon Litzemberger had done a really interesting piece on the outmigration of youth from Saskatchewan. She grew up in very rural Saskatchewan on a farm and moved to Toronto, which was a bit of a shock to her system," says Chalmers-Gauvin. "What she noticed was she would go home every year and another farmhouse would be abandoned."

Litzemberger, who was 17 when she left Saskatchewan in 1998, realized she was part of the mass exodus of youth that changed the landscape of her province. She first presented the multimedia performance HOMEbody in 2012 in Toronto.

"My whole generation sort of left the Prairies and left a kind of way of life behind," says Litzemberger. "I was interested in exploring the social impacts of that and making some kind of commentary on the importance of home and the things that home contains for us."

When she and Chalmers-Gauvin first started talking about the symposium, Litzemberger saw there was a real connection between her show and the experiences of people in New Brunswick, and as a contemporary dancer and choreographer, she's a big believer in art as a catalyst for change in society.

"I think art is a great place to begin some of these more difficult conversations, where it doesn't always operate from a basis of logic, but a real basis of emotion," says Litzemberger.

"There is a lot of movement between provinces and in and out of the country, so I imagined this story, even though it's told through a very personal and specific lens, has a universal resonance to many people in Canada."

"I think it's very important for the people of New Brunswick who participate in the symposium to create their own story and share their own experiences and to start to construct the kind of collective future that they believe in."

The Atlantic Ballet Theatre of Canada partnered with ArtsLink NB – a non-profit service organization for artists in the province – on the HOMEbody Symposium. Chalmers-Gauvin said from the beginning, it was imperative that organizers hear the voice of the province's young people, and also newcomers to the province as they sculpted the symposium.

Through focus groups at



Levi Lawrence, president and co-owner of Real Food Connections, will be sharing his story as one of the N.B. Changemakers at the upcoming HOMEbody symposium in Fredericton on May 6. PHOTO: JAMES WEST/THE DAILY GLEANER



Shannon Litzemberger says the set used in HOMEbody becomes a kind of metaphor for the transformation of home throughout your life. PHOTO: KEVIN KONNYU



In HOMEbody, the fence represents the farm as the show begins, transforms at some point to the windows of an apartment and then at the end transforms again to a present-day home. PHOTO: KEVIN KONNYU

post-secondary institutions across the province, Chalmers-Gauvin said they learned students wanted to hear from young people who were trying to do something in the province – and understand both their successes and failures.

To fulfill that request, organizers pulled together 22 "N.B. Changemakers" to share their stories at the symposium. Moncef Lakouas, executive director of the Student Leadership Movement of Greater Moncton Inc., and Lewis Lawrence, the president and co-owner of Real Food Connections Ltd., are two of them.

Lakouas first came to the province 10 years ago as an international student to study at Université de Moncton.

"I was born and raised in Morocco until the age of 21. I decided to pack my stuff and come to New Brunswick to do my bachelor of finance degree," he says. "I didn't know anyone, I couldn't speak English or write it or understand it."

"After finishing his degree, he moved to Montreal where he had his own business. "The business brought me back to Ontario in 2010. Things were not going as I wanted them to, so I decided to

go back to school in January 2012 and do another bachelor degree in accounting," he says.

Upon his return, Lakouas got involved in many different community organizations, both on and off campus.

"I've travelled quite often. I've been in the States, Europe, I lived in Montreal, I lived in Africa. I know that there is potential in this province. The only thing is we need to change the story," he says. "Anybody and everybody has the potential to achieve anything that they want. As (author) Napoleon Hill said, 'Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, the mind can achieve.'"

Lakouas says he's proud to be a part of the symposium, and is excited to share his story and hear the stories of the other presenters.

"I hope and believe, deep inside my heart, that whoever is going to be attending that conference, whatever they're thinking of – project or idea – that they just jump in, do it," he says. "Somebody is going to be able to help them and they have the full potential of achieving it in New Brunswick."

Lawrence of Real Food Connections

and the place that had already emotional ties, if I was going to put 80 hours a week into somewhere, it may as well be home," says Lawrence.

He hopes the symposium helps start the conversation about what is possible here.

"I was a returning student, I went back to get a business degree in my late 20s, and since then what I've learned is in New Brunswick, there is nobody you can't ask for help, there's nobody you can't contact. It's so well-connected and so horizontal," he says.

While Real Food Connections is doing well, Lawrence says there have been bumps along the way. He plans to share those as well as his successes at the symposium, as it's all part of his story.

Those honest conversations are what organizers are hoping for.

"What we tried to do was create that cross-section so that young people can think about any opportunity, whether you want to work in construction, whether you want to work in the food industry – it's about creating those opportunities in every section," says Chalmers-Gauvin, adding even the Atlantic Ballet Theatre of Canada is a great example of that "impossible dream happening in New Brunswick."

"We started our company in 2001 and a lot of people laughed," she says, noting they were told, "You can't have an international (ballet) company in New Brunswick."

They didn't let that deter them.

"That's got nothing to do with opportunity, with skill, with your business plan, with the talent you've pulled together. That's about a perception of place, and that's the conversation we want to change," she says. "Let's talk about the successes in New Brunswick, and yes, we're one of them. Last year, we had over 300 applications from all over the world to come and work in our province."

Through the HOMEbody Symposium, organizers want to focus on the positives and the possibilities.

"We want those young people to tell us what that headline should be. Let's create the story of New Brunswick as a place of opportunity and innovation," says Chalmers-Gauvin.

On top of the N.B. Changemakers, helping them do this are three guest speakers: John Bragg, the founder and owner of Oxford Frozen Foods; Richard Saillant, director of the Canadian Institute for Research on Public Policy and Public Administration; and Noah Richler, an award-winning Canadian author.

People are encouraged to come to the symposium, which runs from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Fredericton Convention Centre, go to the performance of HOMEbody at The Playhouse from 6:30 to 8 p.m., then return to the Fredericton Convention Centre at 8 p.m. for the wrap-up and reception.

For more information, visit homebody-symposium.com. The symposium is open to the public. Tickets can be purchased on the website for the full day or for the performance in the evening. "We're trying to spark a conversation, a dialogue, in the province of New Brunswick as a place of hope, innovation and opportunity," says Chalmers-Gauvin. "And we do hope those conversations grow from this one event into many, many conversations and projects and action."