**The 79th New Brunswick Competitive Festival begins on Monday**

The 79th year for the New Brunswick Competitive Festival of Music begins Monday leading into a two-week celebration of local talent.

Founded in 1936 it was the only festival in the province for many years, which is why it is called the New Brunswick Festival, but over time others have sprung up.

This year fewer elementary school choirs will be taking part because of restrictions on bus travel, said festival administrator, Nadine Lane. So the festival is taking choral adjudicator, Donna Rhodenizer to conduct workshops in the schools that can’t make it.

“Some of the schools they are going to would have taken part in the festival five years ago,” Lane said. “Unless the school has a PALS program or a parent teachers association to fund the cost, or do fundraising, they are basically stuck.”

The competition for elementary and middle school choirs used to take a whole week of mornings, but now that part of the festival is down to two mornings and part of an afternoon, Lane said.

“The high school are still fine because for the most part we use Saint John High and those kids can get there on their own,” she said.

Because of the harsh winter and record number of cancelled classes due the snow days, there was talk that festival might not even be able to take place, she said.

But the school principals are supportive and view the competition as part of the music curriculum, so it is going ahead, she said.

A new feature this year is an expansion of the school band program which will take place at Harbour View High School on Wednesday morning the 22nd and Friday afternoon the 24th, she said.

Two important events are the April Mills Junior Star Concert on Saturday, April 25th at Portland United Church and the Founders’ Night Gala Concert at Saint John High School on Saturday, May 2 at 7 pm.

The first concert brings together the top competitors aged 14 and under in all categories. Around 40 children are chosen by the adjudicators and then the top three will receive awards.

The concert at the end of the festival celebrates the intermediate and senior performers from age 15 up to university age.

“We are fortunate as a festival to have a considerable amount of trust fund investments that we are able to give away to students, to help with their university costs,” she said.

The festival is bringing in 10 adjudicators, six for the first week and four for the second week. Three are from New Brunswick, one from Nova Scotia and six from Ontario.

A couple of the adjudicators are being shared with the Fredericton Music Festival to help defray costs because of them are not needed for a whole week, she said.

Advance tickets for the two concerts are available at he competition venues and Veronica’s Music Store.

The festival committee is already planning ahead for the 80th anniversary next year and hope to have the final gala concert at the Imperial Theatre.