

For August 5, 2009

By Doc Heide

How many narcissists does it take to screw in a light bulb? Just one---he holds it while the world revolves around him.

With our economy in a tailspin due to selfishness, AFT's summer season explores the opposite theme: taking care of each other.

We don't program our seasons to have underlying themes, but sometimes they have accidental ones. This year our two world-premiere shows both center on the common good.

Big Cheese

In "Cheeseheads, The Musical", a faceless corporation takes over a small Wisconsin cheese factory and threatens to shut it down. The shift manager (played by AFT favorite Doug Mancheski) mentions that the corporation's CEO got a bonus as big as the company's entire health care payments.

I won't give away the ending, but it's an act of solidarity that earns standing ovations most nights.

The show also celebrates what unites us as a region. Doug has people leaping from their seats to declare themselves cheeseheads, regardless of where they come from.

Our other premiere, "Sunsets & S'mores", sheds light on our commonalities in other ways. First, it reminds us that the stupendous piece of land we now call Peninsula State Park was once owned privately. Thanks to a handful of visionaries, it belongs to us all.

The show draws songs liberally from the folk arena. Nobody collects royalties on "Shenandoah" or "The Water is Wide", yet that doesn't blemish their beauty.

I get to sing an old folksong in the show, "Ivan Petrusky Skivar", that I learned at my father's knee. It's about two narcissistic guys who can't rein in their pride and end up killing each other.

It's nice to remember that once upon a time people created songs just for the fun of it, heedless of personal gain.

For One, For All

Beyond the shows, it's a pleasure at this stressful moment in American history to work at a place built on serving community. AFT has always been dedicated to keeping ticket prices among the lowest of any professional musical theatre. We want everybody to come and bring the kids.

The theatre we use at Peninsula State Park doesn't belong to AFT---it's yours. Generous donors gave tens of thousands of dollars to build our stage and dressing room. But as soon as these were constructed, we signed them over to the state of Wisconsin. We only lease our space in the park.

Even AFT doesn't belong to AFT. We're nonprofit. We have an elected board. We're about something larger than any individual.

Our parish priest recently came to "Cheeseheads" and wrote me, "If one underemployed guy goes home from the play and as he goes to sleep, thinks 'I want to love those close to me more'---what a huge gift!"

A huge gift, indeed---and wouldn't it be great if the world revolved around that.

See you under the stars.

AFT performs at the Peninsula State Park Theatre Monday-Saturday through August 29. The world premiere ***Cheeseheads, the Musical*** plays Monday at 8 pm, Wednesday at 6 pm, Thursday at 8 pm and Saturday at 8:30pm. ***Sunsets & S'mores***, a centennial celebration of Peninsula State Park, plays 8 pm on Tuesday and 6 pm on Saturday. ***Muskie Love*** returns on Wednesday at 8:30pm

and Friday at 8 pm. Advanced and reserved tickets are available at www.folkloretheatre.com, at 854-6117, at the AFT office in the Green Gables Shops in North Ephraim, or at the box office at the theatre one hour prior to performance. A park sticker is not required in the theatre lot for the show.

Doc Heide is co-founder, playwright, and performer with American Folklore Theatre.