

## Ibsen's 'Enemy' also ours

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contemporary  
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Michael Chandler as Dr. Thomas Stockmann and Sheila Davis as Catherine Stockmann rehearse for the play *Enemy of the People* at Pond Playhouse in Halifax in this April 1 photograph.

## **Economy vs. the environment theme of Enemy of the People**

TAG mounts Ibsen play that's still fresh today

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter

A popular doctor and his brother, the mayor, work together to bring medicinal baths — like Banff Springs — to their town, knowing that the tourist influx will cause an economic boom.

But the doctor discovers waste from a nearby tannery is polluting the baths and wants to shut them down.

To his surprise, his warning is not only ignored by the townspeople unwilling to let their economic windfall go, he is denounced as an enemy of the people.

The plot may sound contemporary, but *An Enemy of the People*, by Norway's Henrik Ibsen, was written in 1882.

"In the last few years we've had Walkerton and the oilsands," says Gisela O'Brien, who is directing the classic for the Theatre Arts Guild.

"It makes us think about what we'd do in this situation. It doesn't resolve anything, but it should make people think about current issues, about municipal politics, about scientific facts. We're dealing with two totally different personalities, trying to do what's right for the public. It forces us to decide what side we'll be on and brings the issue to the stage."

The drama, featuring a cast of 18, runs at the Pond Playhouse, 6 Parkhill Rd. in Halifax, from Wednesday to Saturday at 8 p.m. until April 30. There will be no performance on Good Friday.

O'Brien admits the serious play is a departure for both the community theatre group — which often stages comedies and thrillers — and for her. The Halifax resident, who was the administrative officer in the Dalhousie theatre department for many years, is known for directing musicals, and her last play for TAG was *Oklahoma* two years ago.

She appeared in a production many years ago in Ottawa as Petra, the doctor's daughter, a teacher who is fired from her school after the doctor tries to get the baths closed.

"We had these incredibly intense discussions after rehearsal, talked about things like how does a scientist deal with the knowledge of the truth."

But when O'Brien came back to it recently with a view to directing, she found it long, repetitive and dry in the first couple of translations she read. So she was thrilled to discover a 1950s translation by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Arthur Miller that she says is much more audience-friendly.

That is the version that TAG is staging with a cast of nine men and three women, along with six more people for a crowd scene when Dr. Stockmann is run out of town.

For the role of Dr. Stockmann, who chases the truth, O'Brien has cast Michael Chandler. His brother Peter, the mayor, who chases power and politics, is portrayed by Rob McIntyre.

"I love the way the two interact," O'Brien says. "Both are very strong actors. There's an emotional attachment between them you rarely see, though you get glimpses.

"The two are enemies for life after this and it causes deep, deep wounds."

O'Brien says one thing that strikes her about the play is the loneliness at the top.

"It's a really interesting concept. There are different forms of going it alone. (Dr.) Stockmann has the truth and if he's going to work on the truth, he will be alone. It affects his wife and children. His landlord evicts them. I find the idea of going it alone and what the consequences are intriguing. It's hard to be the odd person out."

She believes Ibsen had an incredible ability to project people's personalities onstage.

"You can write about someone's personality, their values and their morality . . . but to have audiences be able to pick it up is pretty well genius."

Tickets are \$16 — \$13 for students, seniors and TAG members — and are available through [ticketatlantic.com](http://ticketatlantic.com), at Superstore outlets or by phone at 451-1221.

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