

Get scene, be heard

If you love the theatre, there's no reason not to give it a try.

HRM has a rich diversity of community theatre companies looking for volunteers ready for the spotlight, or wanting to help out behind the scenes.

From the Theatre Arts Guild in Halifax, the longest-running group in Canada to the newly established Eventurous Theatre in Middle Sackville, there is no shortage of opportunities to get on stage.

Nancy Morgan is the executive director of Theatre Nova Scotia, which provides support and resources to community and professional theatre groups across the province.

"Community theatre allows for people to participate in a level of artistic expression of which they're comfortable," Morgan said. "From their audiences, to directors and performers."

All community theatres in HRM are non-profit and volunteer-run. The people who put the shows on are there purely for a love of theatre, Morgan said.

"There are some really active and long-standing community theatres in HRM, and the testament to them is that some of their volunteers have been with them for decades," she said.

Theatre Nova Scotia assists these groups with obtaining certain scripts for production, holding workshops, or helping to find a choreographer.

Theatre Nova Scotia grew from the Nova Scotia Drama League, the sole purpose of which was to support Community Theatre initiatives. As the professional theatre groups began to grow beyond Neptune Theatre, the organization expanded to include all facets of theatre in the province.

Angela Butler is the president of the Theatre Arts Guild, or TAG, as it's better known.

"We have about 200 members currently, and we're always getting new people," Butler said. "We've been around for over 80 years and there are still people who don't know we exist, so we're still able to grow."

For Butler, it's not just about the fun of performing.

"We like to mentor, to help people learn new skills, and not just when it comes to acting," she said. "We cover producing, directing, costume design, lighting, sound, and we take pride in that."

"I think it's wonderful that more are opening up shop, as community groups we help each other out," she said. "Sure it's competition, but we don't think of it that way."

Butler said one of the most rewarding aspects of TAG is seeing people from all walks of life coming together for a common goal. She added that it enhances community spirit.

"Everybody is on the same playing field, we're all in this together," she said.

IF YOU GO

- Community Theatres in HRM
- Bedford Players
- Dartmouth Players
- Eastern Shore Players
- Eventurous Theatre, Middle Sackville
- Plutonium Playhouse
- SAINTS ALIVE! Theatre Society
- Theatre Arts Guild/Wildfire Theatre

Katherine Tufts, who is performing in the upcoming show *Arsenic and Old Lace* at The Bedford Players Community Theatre said being part of these groups has helped her adjust to a new home.

“We moved to Nova Scotia because my husband got a job here, we came here in August 2011, and my first priority was to get my family settled,” Tufts said. “Once I did that I said ‘OK, now it’s time for me,’ so I had to find some community theatre.”

Tufts has been active in theatre since she was very young, but had to put it on the back burner after having children.

“I didn’t know anything about the area and Bedford was one of the first ones that popped up when I did a search for community theatre and it was meant to be because they had an audition posting for a play two weeks from that time,” she said.

“I haven’t looked back since, *Arsenic and Old Lace* is my third play with The Bedford Players and I’ve done a show with The Dartmouth Players as well,” she said. “The Bedford theatre for me, it just always feels like coming home to family. They welcomed me with open arms the minute I stepped through the door.”

Tufts was able to establish a strong circle of friends after performing in her first show at Bedford Players called *It’s Murder in the Wings*.

“None of you are there for a paycheque, you’re there because you love it,” she said. “You sense that when you’re there and that’s the beauty of it.”

Community theatre’s impact on HRM

Community Theatres are important because they give people a chance to be involved in artistic and cultural expression. It gives participants a chance to explore a passion for theatre that is different than experiencing it as an audience member. It fosters understanding of the amount of work, preparation and talent that goes into the performing arts. It fosters team building, as successful plays are the result of a cohesive team and develops great friendships. Participation (either performing or otherwise) has an amazing health benefit — both mentally and physically — as it keeps people active and engaged with others, within their community, provides them opportunities to step outside their comfort zones and take some risks. Audiences to community theatres are often quite loyal and interested in the success of the organizations. They provide a sense of pride in community and allow for cultural experiences created by their neighbours, friends, colleagues, and family. There is also an economic impact — ticket sales, ripple effect spending on dinners prior to shows, program ad sales, sponsorships and partnerships, the purchases for productions and any maintenance of buildings.

— **Nancy Morgan, President of Theatre NS**