

# Halifax's Theatre Arts Guild sets the stage for volunteers

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The Theatre Arts Guild recently closed the comedy *Having Hope at Home*, directed by Michele Moore. Pictured from left: Dawn Shaw, Debora Pollock, Phil Reid and Mike Taylor tell the stories of three (soon to be four) generations living under one roof. (BRUCE GOODICK)

Michele Moore spent her childhood in northern Ireland. "Live theatre was a treat," she recalls. "Always an excitement."

In 1983, Moore was into her adult years, by then living in Nova Scotia, and pondering the question, "What do I love to do?" She thought of the theatre, sought out a local play — *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* — and notes there were six people in the audience. She loved it. She went to another play, saw an audition notice and, with permission, watched the process. On the way home in her car she thought, "I could do that!" And it turns out she really wanted to, so she auditioned.

"I got a role with a glittery gown and fur cape," Moore laughs. Over the last 25 years, Moore also volunteered on the theatre's board — first as secretary — and did more stage work. She produced and directed plays and currently works the publicity file. There is no hint she is thinking of slowing down or moving on.

Volunteering at the Halifax-based Theatre Arts Guild (TAG) — Canada's oldest, continuous community theatre — Moore says she learned many things and "realized every single one of us has a creative bent and we need to let that out."

For Moore and many more, the theatre is the perfect vehicle.

"The people you meet [at the theatre] and the astonishing talent that walks through its doors are incredible," Moore says. For people who want to give back but lack funds, the theatre is a wonderful place to volunteer because "it's only time" and "it's good for the community." Moore describes a hardworking and fun atmosphere where "everyone is greeted as an old friend."

The theatre offers a tremendous variety of volunteer jobs, from actors and stage managers to sewers and thrift store shoppers. Every show needs a small team to look after front of house, including the bar and tickets. Alternatively, volunteers can join the TAG maintenance group every Wednesday evening when they tend to the chores of the building. A non-profit, the TAG also relies on membership drives and other fundraising activities.

"Don't be bored," says Moore. "Be involved!" The doors of the TAG are always open for people who want to join.

Perhaps the result of an 87-year history, TAG volunteers assemble training manuals for almost every job, which is helpful and encouraging for new volunteers. In the end, Moore assures volunteers are never alone.

"I had no idea how to act or direct," says Moore, yet she learned with the help of the group.

“If you have a warm body and a heartbeat,” Moore says, “TAG wants you.” It seems no matter the interests or aptitudes of volunteers, the theatre has a job for everyone.

“It’s crazy the hours that some put into the theatre,” says Moore, who believes the longevity of the theatre is the result of “a determined core of volunteers and supporters who decided it’s important enough to keep it going.”

“We don’t want to ever lose that.”

Next for the theatre is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, with shows beginning in April. For more information, visit [tagtheatre.com](http://tagtheatre.com).

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