

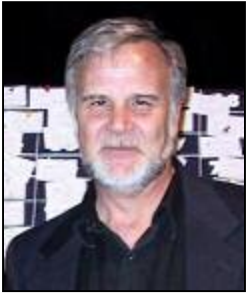
Shadowland Theatre

Shadowland's 2004 Season Opens

by Bill Morris

Producing Artistic Director, *Shadowland Theatre*

First let me just say that I apologize if my speech this evening is a little short. But I was busy doing some banking this morning, then went for a nice jog, and spent most of the afternoon "relaxing" in some briars down on **Ann Street**. Then there was the two hours at *Ellenville Hospital* stitching up the dog bites...



It's such hard work funding a not-for-profit these days... but I've posted bail and am happy to speak with you tonight.

[Ed. note: Morris, photo left, who delivered this speech at the May 18th *Noonday Club* dinner, is referring, jocularly, to the robbery at *Fleet Bank* that morning.]

Let me once again thank the *Noonday Club* for bestowing on the *Shadowland* the honor of *2002 Citizen of the Year*. We were grateful for the honor, and the recognition of our value and place in our community. At *Shadowland* this year, we have a renewed sense of community with our audience, our supporters, and the businesses that are our friends and neighbors.

Nationwide, there are only few hundred not-for-profit professional theaters. Most exist in urban centers and larger cities. Many exist in wealthy suburban communities and towns. These areas supply easier access to larger sources of private and corporate funding. Hardly a handful of theaters nationwide are exceptions to those rules.

Shadowland is one. Yearly, we are staffed by theater professionals (mostly based in NYC) who travel theater to theater, city to city, throughout the country, working stints of eight weeks to six months. Those who come to *Shadowland* for the first time are usually shocked that such a theater exists in such a small town. And they are consistently awed by the extraordinary commitment that this community has made to the theater. And at *Shadowland*, we want to give back as much as we get.

The "smallness" of this community is as much an advantage as it may be an obstacle. It allows for the building of significant and established relationships between the institution and the community. For the community, it's the added amenity of a familiar and valued art institution and open storefront. For the businesses, it's an influx of staff and audience who will be coming in mass every weekend of the summer... driving in from other towns, down from the hills, and (hopefully) opening their minds (and wallets) to all the services that Ellenville has to offer. For the theater, it's the benefits of knowing our supporters well and knowing specifically where to look for what we need. (Usually Earl Thornton.) And for our subscriber audience, it's more than just a source of affordable quality entertainment, it's also the sense of ownership one has as a subscribing member, knowing that just by seeing a show, their contribution has kept this experiment alive.

Spring is always an exciting (and frantic) time at the theater. New staff arrives, rehearsals begin, housing is cleaned and painted, new leaks are found and emergency calls are made to Earl Thornton every hour. But, most

importantly, the audience begins signing up and our subscriber base begins.

And this is where you come in. How can you help, how can you join us in our mission, how can you aid Ellenville in its rebirth? The simplest and (probably) most rewarding way possible: Buy a subscription and come see a show. The lifeblood of the *Shadowland* (and ANY not-for-profit professional theater) is in its subscriber base. Last year, *Shadowland* had 558 subscribers. This year's goal is 650. This goal number represents roughly 25% of our annual budget. We're at 475 as of this morning, May 18th. This goal number is a deliberate number and it is a necessity. This number fills our seats and our coffers and let's us start our season with the funding we'll need for the long haul through the summer.

A subscription offers you admission to each of the five shows this season, which will probably be one the best and most diverse in recent years. We're opening with "Proof," the Pulitzer Prize winner from 2001. "Proof" is an exciting and compelling mystery and drama about a brilliant young mathematician facing the fear of inheriting the genius and mental illness of her famous father. The cast is exceptional, I'm happy to say, and the show is directed by one of the most brilliant stage directors of the modern age: the shockingly talented (and equally handsome) Brendan Burke. (I knew I should have proofread this material that Brendan handed me!)

The second show is a wonderful comedy called "Wrong Turn at Lungfish," which played for years in NYC starring George C. Scott. This comedy examines the clash of wit and intellect between a blind and bitter college professor and the street wise and saucy young woman who volunteers to read to him at the hospital. This play will star William V. Morris, charming in his own right, but a mere shadow of (the previously exalted) Brendan Burke. (I *really* should have reviewed this!)

The hilarious farce this year will be "Perfect Wedding," a crazy, door-slamming, riotous romp that follows a groom's desperate attempts to cover up a bachelor party indiscretion.

This summer's musical offering will be "Meshuggah-nuns," the hilarious installment of the Nonsense series where the Little Sisters of Hoboken have to fill in for the cast of a cruise ship production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

And our final show this season will be the drama "Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune." Made famous by the movie starring Michelle Pfeiffer and Al Pacino, it explores the difficulty of establishing a relationship between two passionate and weathered people later in life.

Most of all, your subscription allows us to give back. Perhaps the greatest gift we can give back to you is the work itself, but we can't give it if you're not there. So pick up a brochure on your way out. Order a subscription and come see a show. If you're already with us, pass one along, recommend us to a neighbor, friend, or family member. Help us reach our goal and enjoy five nights of great live entertainment.

Join our family. The people who make up our base audience feel privileged to be members. They feel a certain ownership in our organization. And they look at Ellenville with a sense of pride; that, in the most unlikely of places, in an underdog of a town, lies a world-class arts institution and top-notch professional theater.

So help us out. Buy a subscription; see a show; keep me out of jail. 