

Working together a natural thing at AFT

Key to the Door Weekly

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By Fred 'Doc' Heide

Recently I stumbled across a fascinating tidbit of research on animal decision-making. Just like people, other animals need to decide together where to go for food, water or shelter. Until recently biologists assumed that the dominant member of a herd of, say, red deer made this call and the rest would traipse along compliantly.

So scientists were surprised to discover that members of the herd “vote” by vocalizing, then all go to the watering hole that gets the largest number of votes. (I suppose you could call this deer-mocracy). Check out publications by British biologists Larissa Conradt and Timothy Roper for more info.

This is exhilarating news for those who thought Congress is emulating red-clawed Nature when it seems unable to accomplish the simplest task. In reality, Nature is apparently doing better at collective cogitating than humans.

As co-author of the deer-hunting musical “Guys & Does”, I was tickled pink. Maybe we’d get further in solving the national budget crisis if we turned it over to Bambi and her pals. They certainly know how to raise a buck or two.

Woodsy Community

But I digress. I brought this up because AFT is a bit like that herd of deer. We’re not an autocracy. We’re a community.

When decisions loom, issues are batted back and forth like conceptual volleyballs at senior staff meetings, production meetings, board meetings, board retreats, or informal yak-fests in the dressing room. Artistic and managing directors Jeff Herbst and Dave Maier really want to hear everybody’s opinions and weigh them with Solomon-like care.

Sometimes it feels like AFT is church camp for thespians. Everybody shares the work. Everybody cares about everybody else.

Last night I saw managing director Dave Maier out at the theatre in an orange vest helping our patrons park cars before the show. I'm pretty sure this isn't in his job description.

On a recent Sunday (our only day off each week) music director Tim Lenihan had to move out of his Chicago apartment because the building got sold unexpectedly. To help out, drummer Bergin Maustad, techie Josh Alley, and intern Mary Vey piled into his car after their second show Saturday night, arriving in the Windy City bleary-eyed at 4 AM.

It's an understatement to say this is beyond the call of duty. Fortunately they got assistance from Tim's large Irish family (many of whom are on the police force). Bergin quipped, "I now feel like I can do anything in Chicago. If I got in trouble, I'd just tell the cops, 'Get Lenihan on the walkie-talkie.'"

When I arrive for the evening, company members or volunteers always greet me warmly. When rain sweeps in, even non-techie company members offer a hand to clear the set. Some of our board members spend so much time at the theatre helping out that I've started to wonder if they're secretly camping out behind the concession booth.

I could offer examples endlessly. When "Victory Farm" composer James Valcq came to see the show recently, he bounced over to the pit afterward to hug each musician individually. Keyboardist Jamie Schmidt asked if he had any notes for us. James laughed and said dryly, "G Sharp."

Compliments and Cookies

Other cast members bring treats for the cast. Dan Klarer treks out to the theatre some nights just to give us pie. Molly Rhode and Chase Stoeger celebrate National

Donut Day with scrumptious morsels for everybody. AFT fans and volunteers cook meals for the cast or bring sweet morsels almost nightly.

In sum, AFT is giving those red deer a run for the money in getting along with each other. You don't need antlers or hoofs to care for each other deer-ly.

See you under the stars.

AFT's summer season closes August 25. We present "Victory Farm" Monday and Thursdays at 8 PM, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM, and Saturday at 6 PM. "Belgians in Heaven" takes the stage Wednesdays at 6 PM and Fridays at 8 PM. "Cheeseheads: The Musical" performs Tuesdays at 8 PM and Saturdays at 8:30 PM. For information about this or our indoor Fall Season, call 920-854-6117 or visit www.folkloretheatre.com.



Fred 'Doc' Heide is a co-founder, playwright and performer with American Folklore Theatre