

**June 17, 2009**

**By Doc Heide**

On our trip out here last month from my winter home in Berkeley, my girlfriend Jody and I saw one testament after another to the recession.

We pulled off I-90 to mail a package in small town in corn-growing South Dakota (where a billboard announced “We’re all ears”). Everything had shut down. No café. No stores. Not even a bar.

We’d almost given up when an SUV whipped past and led us to the only open business: a post office. You know the American economy is struggling when towns are scraping by on the 42 cents they get when some dude mails a letter. Jody nicknamed the place “Destitute, South Dakota.”

### **RAGING RECESSION**

Now, people on the Great Plains have enough problems without a faltering economy. The never-ending wind, for example. While we were driving through, we saw it blow the feathers off a chicken and carry a county line three hundred yards to the east.

But the economy is what’s grabbing our attention. People are so strapped for cash they’re going to Kentucky Fried Chicken to lick other peoples’ fingers.

And that’s one big reason I’m glad AFT will be premiering “Cheeseheads: The Musical” this week.

The show, by Dave Hudson and Paul Libman, takes place in a Sheboygan factory that’s just been sold to a corporate giant, Conglomerated Cheeses. This causes a gradual worsening of life for the longtime employees we come to know and love.

This may sound depressing, but it’s quite the opposite. Dave and Paul have used the factory’s problems as a backdrop for a hilarious, uplifting story of

finding true love, achieving the American dream, and creating the perfect Wisconsin cheese.

### TIMELY TOPIC

There's great camaraderie among the employees, led by AFT stalwart Doug Mancheski as shift manager. The show sports a delightful romantic triangle (played by Molly Rhode, Chase Stoeger, and AFT newcomer Pamela Niespodziani), a gadget geek (Dan Klarer), a mute mechanic (Lee Becker), a quirky cheese scientist (yours truly), and the fun of converting a Texas business consultant into a true cheesehead.

Sprinkled amid this are references to ballooning health care costs, shrinking pension funds, and a killer song called "Average American" that most of us will identify with.

Nobody asked me, but I think there are enough brain-dead musicals in the world. I like shows to be wildly entertaining, but also about something.

"Cheeseheads is about the need to unite to keep what we believe in. And I bet you'll believe in this show.

Incidentally, next week several local businesses will be donating a share of their profits to AFT: Orchard Country Winery & Market (June 23), The Cookery and Fun Stuff (June 24), and Door County Nature Works (June 26). You can help us out by shopping there those days.

See you under the stars.

Doc Heide is co-founder, playwright, and performer with American Folklore Theatre.

AFT performs at the Peninsula State Park Theatre Monday-Saturday through August 29. The world premiere ***Cheeseheads, the Musical*** plays Monday at 8 pm, Wednesday at 6 pm, Thursday at 8 pm and Saturday at 8:30pm. ***Sunsets & S'mores***, a celebration of Peninsula State Park's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, takes the

stage at 8 pm on Tuesday and 6 pm on Saturday. **Muskie Love** returns on Wednesday at 8:30pm and Friday at 8 pm. Advanced and reserved tickets are available at [www.folkloretheatre.com](http://www.folkloretheatre.com), at 854-6117, at the AFT office in the Green Gables Shops in North Ephraim, or at the box office at the theatre one hour prior to each performance. A park sticker is not required in the theatre lot for the show.