

**For June 24, 2009**

**By Doc Heide**

Parks have personalities. The great ones of the West---Yosemite and Yellowstone---are like highly evolved yogis, profound yet aloof. If they could speak, they probably wouldn't bother. They've expressed their deepest thoughts in greenery and granite.

Peninsula State Park, on the other hand, is like a gregarious Wisconsin grandmother. Fun-loving and nurturing, she's only grown more convivial after 100 years. If she could talk, she'd say, "Here's your hotdog, sweetie---now don't go swimming for at least an hour."

### **Park Passion**

Plenty of folks feel as affectionately toward this park as they do toward their grandmas. This was obvious at the recent Centennial Dedication ceremony. The Amphitheatre brimmed with 400 park devotees, despite weather so cold we saw some guy's toupee take off and fly south for the winter.

This week, AFT joins the love-fest by premiering "Sunsets & S'mores", our centennial tribute to the park. Created by Matt Zembrowski, Lee Becker and myself, "S&S" is the distant cousin of our show in 2000, "Moonlight & Marshmallows", the most successful musical revue we've ever presented.

From "Moonlight", we've borrowed the wildly popular audience sing-alongs. Lee Becker will play camp director, leading three interns: Alexander Mace, and Amber and Josh Alley (niece and nephew of AFT co-founder Fred Alley). Lovely Amber is so into AFT that she actually has its logo tattooed on her back.

We've written a bunch of songs that humorously explore park history. For example, there's "Ode to the Niagara Escarpment", praising the great limestone spine under the park.

Rehearsing it recently, Lee Becker quipped, “You don’t often hear ‘rock’ music from the AFT stage.” (Chase Stoeger responded, “He just wants to be in the ‘lime’ light.”) We think this is the first---and probably last---song ever written which contains a rhyme about the Silurian Age.

### **Gleeful Girls**

The show features a sparkling section about a girls’ camp that flourished in the park between world wars. Out of the newspaper the girls wrote, we’ve plucked hilarious poems and set them to jaunty tunes, such as “Dear Old Daddy Longlegs” and “Doughnut Blues”.

Every night we’ll read from audience comments gathered before the show on such topics as “Have you or your dog ever done something heroic while camping?”

You’ll also hear of my childhood encounter with a flaming marshmallow and a straw cowboy hat, and how I developed an outhouse phobia long before psychiatrists knew how to treat this disorder successfully.

Some of our favorite folksongs have found their way into the show, such as “Shenandoah” and “The Water is Wide”.

We hope this all does justice to a great park. If Peninsula had a personality, it would be perky, popular, and playful. We’d like “Sunsets & S’mores” to be that way, too.

See you under the stars.

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.

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