Double Edge Theatre in Ashfield receives $275K grant

By Cori Urban | Special to The Republican
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Double Edge Theatre has been selected to receive $275,000 in funding through ArtPlace America's 2017 National Creative Placemaking Fund because of the theatre's steadfast commitment to creative placemaking in rural areas.

"It's a great honor to be recognized nationally by ArtPlace America," said Cariel Klein, associate producer. "This grant not only champions and furthers arts-driven community development but raises awareness about Double Edge Theatre, which is so intricately woven into the economic, cultural and social fabric of our rural community."

ArtPlace received 987 applications in 2017, from which 70 finalists were selected. Double Edge Theatre is one of only 23 projects that will receive funding this year.

ArtPlace focuses its work on creative placemaking, an evolving field of practice that invites artists and arts organizations to play integral roles in developing, shaping, educating and engaging their communities.

"Arts-driven community development is when cultural and arts organizations in rural or marginalized communities work to improve their economies by leveraging their creativity and artistic and cultural assets and find creative solutions to local challenges," Klein explained. "This is exactly what Double Edge Theatre is doing in Ashfield, which was once a booming farming town but has felt the fall of the agriculture lifestyle."

The close-knit community is home to numerous local artisans and cultural talent, "yet it suffers from a lack of space to actualize a lot of this work," Klein said. The ArtPlace grant allows Double Edge to take advantage of arts-driven community development.

Such development will realize Ashfield as a unique arts destination, one that aggregates creativity, artistic expression, imagination and culture alongside a rural identity. And it will allow Double Edge to celebrate Ashfield's heritage through its work, balancing the present with history.

Lastly, by working with arts and civic organizations to transform unused farm buildings into shared spaces and living works of art, "we will create a new model of rural and economic development," Klein said. "We have committed to raising the visibility of farms, businesses and craftspersons; galvanizing community leaders in various sectors; engaging youth; boosting regional tourism; and demonstrating how art is key to economic sustainability."

Double Edge Theatre will transform currently vacant and underutilized farm buildings in Ashfield into a vibrant arts campus which aims to make Ashfield a destination that aggregates creativity, artistic expression, imagination and culture alongside a rural identity, demonstrating how art is key to economic sustainability.

"These projects are key goals of ours and we would have plans to start eventually, but the ArtPlace grant allows us to start these projects much sooner," Klein said.

Work will commence in stages beginning in 2018; completion dates are not determined.
Double Edge Theatre, an artist-owned organization, was founded in 1982 by Stacy Klein. The ensemble applies vigorous physical training and the principle of an artist's autonomy to create work intimately woven with the community. In 1994, Double Edge moved from Boston to a 105-acre former dairy farm in Ashfield to create a sustainable artistic home.

A highlight of Double Edge's 2017 performances was the Ashfield Town Spectacle, which involved the whole community, a celebration throughout the town inspired by the spirit of Direct Democracy.

For more information on the ArtPlace America grant, visit artplaceamerica.org. For more information on Double Edge Theatre, visit doubleedgetheatre.org.