Double Edge Theatre wins public radio award

ASHFIELD — The town’s artistic organization, Double Edge Theatre, won a New England Public Radio Arts and Humanities award this month.

Double Edge was nominated for the award by a community member, Co-Artistic Director Jennifer Johnson said.

“It’s really meaningful because we work really closely with our community,” Johnson said.

The theater group has a vested interest in Ashfield, its home of 25 years, as all 12 permanent actors live in the town, Johnson said.

The group moved from Boston to a 100-acre Ashfield farm, which now includes two performance and training spaces, production facilities, offices, music and outdoor performance areas as well as pastures and forestland. Part of Double Edge’s overarching goal is to use its surroundings to shape its art. The group says it aims to create “a permanent center of performance, training, research, and cultural exchange” in Ashfield.

When Double Edge relocated to western Massachusetts in 1994, its members realized they had much to learn about rural living, Johnson said, and turned to the community for advice.

“The company sort of discovered the real need for having to learn from the community,” Johnson said.

Double Edge now grows produce and purchases local goods to feed its roughly 40 to 50 performers and employees.

“We’re all in it together. We really want to support our local economy, and we do,” Johnson said. “We also want to have really great local food.”

Double Edge has hosted a number of community events in its tenure, notably the Ashfield Town Spectacle and Culture Fair in June 2017. The two-day event showcased work by Double Edge performers as well as that of 150 local artists, Johnson said, describing it as “an enormous coming together of the community.”

Double Edge will receive the award May 22 at the Log Cabin in Holyoke as part of NEPR’s 11th Annual Arts and Humanities Awards. Other recipients include Pam Victor, founder of Happier Valley Comedy, Inc. of Hadley; and Olivia Ilano Davis, founder and artistic director of Spectrum in Motion Dance Theater Ensemble of Hartford, Connecticut. Composer Alice Parker of Hawley will receive the Lifetime Achievement award. The evening includes music and entertainment.

Tickets are $75 and available at NEPR.net. Proceeds go to New England Public Radio.

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