GCC and Double Edge Theatre to Grow Performing Arts in Franklin County

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This Spring, Greenfield Community College and Double Edge Theatre will embark on a formal collaboration to grow the role of Visual and Performing Arts within the college and greater Franklin County. Kicking off with an Experimental Performance class taught by Double Edge at GCC next semester, this partnership will evolve into a multi-year endeavor to engage a diverse mix of students and community members in longer productions and spectacles.

“We’re in the early stages of planning,” says GCC Theater Department Chair, Tom Geha, who has been instrumental in getting this partnership off the ground, “but the excitement is obvious for both parties.”

Founded in Boston in 1982 as a feminist ensemble and laboratory for the creative process, Double Edge has been an integral part of the community in Ashfield, Massachusetts for the past 25 years. Located on a 105-acre former dairy farm, the theatre welcomes people from around the world to come study, move, perform, produce, and explore the intersection of art and social justice. Over 700 students have come through the company’s rigorous and intensive training. Artistic home to a multitude of passions, skills, and interests, Double Edge attracts thousands of theatregoers every year. Shows are sold out months in advance and the company has brought their imaginative and visceral work across the United States and as far as Central Europe, South America, and Norway.

“We see eye to eye,” says Stacy Klein, Founder and Artistic Director of Double Edge, “Our values and our missions are really similar.”

While GCC has democratized knowledge by bringing quality, affordable education to underrepresented, underserved, and low-income populations, Double Edge has democratized theatre by bringing underrepresented and diverse voices to the art world. Both institutions think critically about inclusion and how to help their rural hometowns flourish by providing access to cosmopolitan perspectives.

“This is the first time we have found a solid, grounded and ‘similar in values’ institution to partner with,” Says Carlos Uriona, one of three co-artistic directors at Double Edge. He applauds GCC’s President, Dr. Yves Salomon-Fernández, for “leading a movement in the region — a game changer in addressing situations of displacement, poverty, and inclusion in our small region of Western Massachusetts.”

GCC’s Dean of Humanities, Leo Hwang, returns the compliment, “We see Double Edge as one of the real hallmarks of a forward thinking organization in Franklin County — they’re really pushing the envelope. It’s an incredible opportunity for GCC to have access to this world class theater company that’s willing to collaborate with us and include us in this process of discovering and learning.”
These performance spectacles have the potential to incorporate students and faculty in all departments to explore historical contexts and literary roots, develop conceptual art and musical scores, research connections to the environment and sustainability, and learn about marketing and production. Double Edge’s spectacles often involve upwards of 60 community members in the production alone, with thousands more in attendance. Because their approach is unique, incorporating such a range of skills and perspectives into the art-making process, many in Franklin Country can benefit from this collaboration.

“Theatre that gets the community involved helps people who feel like they could never participate in culture see that a living culture really does have something to do with them,” says Stacy. “It’s a necessity for flourishing creative lives.”

Leo concurs that this is the “kind of theatre people can connect with even if theater is not their main focus.” What he likes most about Double Edge is the level of research they do to put on a production. “They think deeply about the consciousness that they are trying to elevate. What are the roots of these ideas? Where do they emanate from in literature, history, and culture? What are the personal connections to these experiences? That’s what education is really about.”

Who are we? Who do we want to be? How do we imagine justice? How do we overcome a world of impossibilities and lean into our dreams? These are the questions Double Edge has long asked. Given the shared focus on building a better world, there’s a lot of hope for what this purpose-driven partnership will yield.

Stacy calls it a “sign for a future in which education and cultural institutions are making sure to take the lead on welcoming all people.” And this, she remarks, determines “the future of our whole country.”