

All Hands On Barn

Center Narrative



"I began working with Piti Theatre in 3rd and 5th grade at Colrain Central School creating original productions like "Olde Coleraine" and "The Bald Eagle Story." Later, I joined their Valley Playwright Mentoring program for teens and continued to develop my creativity and leadership skills which I put to use leading the Mohawk Trail Equity Alliance. Now I am pursuing a career in engineering as a "woman in STEM" and have been awarded a scholarship to a great school.

"I think being able to share the podcasts I made with Piti Theatre and their letter of recommendation made a difference in my college success. I hope many more young people get to work with them!" - Rylee Hager, Colrain

Introduction

Piti Theatre Company, where original performances and programming help young people plant seeds of joy, sustainability and justice, is undertaking our first capital campaign to serve more children, youth and families in the the hilltowns of the northern Berkshires. We will use the funds raised to purchase a facility in Charlemont that will become a theater and a center dedicated to ecology and the arts.

Our company has been touring New England, nationally and internationally for almost 20 years engaging 5,000+ people a year. Locally, we have focused on working with hard-to-reach rural schools, running after-school programs for children and at-risk teens, and producing popular festivals for family audiences in Greenfield and Shelburne Falls highlighting local history and the environment.

During the last decade, the company has been exploring what it would mean to offer more to the local community by creating a permanent theater in the Berkshire foothills. Through a combination of luck and planning, this opportunity has now arrived.

The Center

Last year, we were able to purchase a farm house and 18 acres of land on Avery Brook Road in Charlemont. The 18 acres include a large brook, wetlands and other interesting ecological features. Now we have the opportunity to purchase the original barn directly across the road plus 17 more acres to create a new 35-acre educational center for the arts and environment.

The first two phases of our initiative are:

1. Purchasing the barn and land, and
2. Renovating the barn for public events and activities.

While there are a number of summer camps and theaters in our region, there are no venues dedicated to the intersection of arts and ecology. Piti Theatre has been exploring this connection since 2008 when we received our first grant from the Community Foundation of Western MA to support our nature fable "Elmer and the Elder Tree," which was followed by the award-winning international touring production "To Bee or Not to Bee", the recipient of the first Suzy Polluci Food and Justice award from the Franklin Community Co-op which has been seen by more than 30,000 people.

In 2023, after launching a children's summer camp and holding a theater festival in the fall at our new location, we will begin planning for a four season multi-use space above the barn where workshops, performances, classes and conferences can happen year-round. This barn will be surrounded by gardens, an apiary (already in its third year), hiking trails infused with visual art and activities, additional parking and housing for visiting artists and guests.

Piti Theatre's Arts and Ecology Center is ideally located just seven minutes west of Shelburne Falls and we are in conversation with Heath officials and local landowners about serving as a jumping-off point for a regional trail network stretching into Heath and Colrain.

In addition to serving families and children, the Center will support our region's creative economy. We expect activity at the Center to create the equivalent of two full-time jobs and provide camping and short stay possibilities. The center will offer an arts-rich option for those visiting the area to enjoy our region's many opportunities. Piti Theatre has ongoing partnerships with varied businesses and organizations.¹

Thank you for considering joining us on a new era of Piti's work in our community and helping make thousands of imaginative leaps, new insights and memorable experiences possible for this generation of young people and those to come here on Avery Brook Road.

Piti Summary

- Mission: Piti (pronounced "pea-tea") is an ancient Indian (Pali) word translatable as "joy." Piti creates original performances and community-building events that accelerate local transformation towards joy, sustainability and justice.
- 5,000 engaged/year, 50,000+ engaged since 2008
- 4 – 5 school residencies/year + ongoing partnerships with Mohawk Trail Regional High School, Hawlemont Regional School, Colrain Central School and Buckland-Shelburne Elementary
- Past touring in Europe, across the US and Canada
- Mentoring Programs for [teens](#) and [emerging artists](#)
- 8 – 10 "[To Bee or Not to Bee](#)" performances/year
- Long term partnership with Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association ("[Your Town](#)" program, [Great Greenfield DinoFest](#) started in 2017)

¹ E.g. The Academy at Charlemont, Artspace, Attack Bear Press, Berkshire East, Better World Auto Club, Catamount Traders, Community Foundation of Western MA, Community Yoga, Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, Franklin Community Co-op, The Garden Cinema, Greenfield Co-operative Bank, Greenfield Savings Bank, Hearty Eats, Holyoke Media, Katalyst Kombucha, Hilltown Families, Mocha Mayas, Molly Cantor Pottery, New England Foundation for the Arts, Greenfield Cooperative Bank, Greenfield Savings Bank, Hawks and Reed Performing Arts Center, Mary Lyon Foundation, Mass Cultural Council, Mass Humanities, Mirick Insurance Agency, Mohawk Trail Regional School District, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Real Pickles, Trolley Stop, The Water Street Barn, West County Arts and Culture, etc.

Center Budget

- Purchase of Barn and 17 acres: \$152,000
- Renovation of Barn: \$40,000
- Septic System: \$25,000
- Driveway and Parking: \$10,000
- Well: \$10,000
- Gardens and Trails: \$10,000
- Signage: \$3,000

Center Timeline

2023

- February: Capital Campaign Launch
- July - October: Initial events and restoration work

2024

- Creation of trails, apiary education program, pollinator gardens, community garden plots
- Expansion of programming (homeschool, afterschool, ecology workshops, art-farm stand, etc.)

2025 - 2026

- Continued development including all season building and artist/visitor housing

Capital Campaign Committee Members

- Lisa Barnwell Williams (Advisor), Principal, Chanticleer Consulting and Professor, UMASS Arts Extension Service
- Susan Kooperstein, Public Relations Consultant
- Bruce Lessels, Founder, Zoar Outdoor
- Nina Marshall (Chair), Senior Director of Monitoring, Evaluation and Outreach, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
- Jonathan Mirin, Co-Founding Artistic Director, Piti Theatre
- Gary Powsner, Owner, SolutionFinders
- Sue Samoriski, Founding Executive Director, Mary Lyon Foundation (retired)
- Whit Sanford, Consultant and Director of Arms Library “Put a Roof On It” Campaign