

Planting Seeds With A New Arts And Ecology Center In Charlemont

*Your suggestions for this new Center are sought
via a survey at www.ptco.org*

By Jonathan Mirin

Piti Theatre Company, where original performances help young people plant seeds of joy, sustainability and justice, is undertaking our first capital campaign to broaden our programming and serve more families in the hilltowns of the northern Berkshires. We will use the funds raised to purchase a facility in Charlemont that will become a theater and education center dedicated to ecology and the arts. **And** we are hoping you will tell us what you'd like to see happen here! You can take a short survey at www.ptco.org.

Piti Theatre Company was founded in 2004 by American playwright/actor Jonathan Mirin and Swiss choreographer/visual artist Godeliève Richard. The troupe

is based in Shelburne Falls, MA and Les Ponts-de-Martel Switzerland. Piti (pronounced "PEA-tea") is an ancient Indian (Pali) word translatable as joy or rapture. Piti creates original performances and community-building events for all ages. Piti's local programming is dedicated to engaging underserved rural communities across Franklin County. The company produces The Great Greenfield DinoFest and works each year with Colrain Central School, Hawlemont Regional School and now Buckland-Shelburne Elementary.

Piti has also been touring New England, nationally and internationally for almost 20 years reaching about 5,000 people a year. Locally, we have focused on

working with hard-to-reach rural schools, presenting after-school programs for children and teens, and producing popular festivals for family audiences in Greenfield and Shelburne Falls highlighting local history and the environment. Now children we worked with in elementary school are going to college. Colrain's Rylee Hager shares: "I began working with Piti Theatre in 3rd and 5th grade . . . Later, I joined their Valley Playwright Mentoring program for teens and continued to develop my creativity and leadership skills . . . Now I am pursuing a career in engineering as a "woman in STEM" and have been awarded a scholarship to a great school. I

Continued on page 8



The site of Piti Theatre Company's proposed arts and ecology center on Avery Brook Road in Charlemont.

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Piti Theatre Company (continued from page 4)



Jonathan and Ezekiel Mirin prepare for Bee Week.

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!"

During the last decade, the company has been exploring what it would mean to offer more to the local community by creating its own permanent theater in West County. 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.

Even if you don't have children or they have grown up, we want to hear from you! Early ideas of how this center could serve adults include beekeeping education, an art-farm stand featuring the work of local artisans, an arts venue, community gardens, hiking trails and spaces for events and classes.

On the youth-oriented side, early ideas include summer camps, home-school and afterschool programs, etc.

But as much as we'd like to do **EVERYTHING**, choices will need to be made, so please consider completing our survey at www.ptco.org. It should take less than five minutes. Thank you for considering partnering with us on this new adventure so we can continue to plant seeds of possibility here in West County and beyond. The world sure does seem to need it!

Jonathan Mirin is an internationally produced playwright, actor and director who co-founded Piti Theatre Company in 2004 with Godeliève Richard, a Swiss choreographer and visual artist. Piti (pronounced "PEA-tea") is an ancient Indian (Pali) word translatable as "joy" or "rapture." Piti programming plants seeds of joy, sustainability and justice in hearts, minds and communities. Piti offerings in our region includes Valley Arts Mentors, Valley Playwright Mentoring for teens, Bee Weeks/To Bee or Not to Bee, Your Town, the Great Greenfield DinoFest and SYRUP: One Sweet Performing Arts Festival. Jonathan can be reached at jonathan@ptco.org or (413) 625-6569.

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