

GUEST COLUMN |

SILVER LININGS

“You’ve no dough, so relax. / You don’t have to pay an income tax.”

“When your car runs out of gas, then no red lights can you pass!”

These are some of the lyrics from the song “Sunny Side to Every Situation,” from the Musical “42nd St.” This show played a huge part in my development as an actor, and I keep getting struck with epiphanies from its words even decades after I was in it.



AARON ODOM

I’ll give you a little set up. The play takes place in the Great Depression, and the lyrics above are sung by a company of actors and dancers who have just found out that the play they were getting ready to take to Broadway has been canceled. Thus, they are all now unemployed in an absolutely dismal job market.

But, they take the time to remind themselves of what they actually still have going for them with the song “Sunny Side to Every Situation.” Not that their fortunes changed all that much, but they at least feel better about their current circumstances.

I’m thinking of this song while writing this, as I’m in the cast for the WYO/CTG’s co-production of “First Date,” which opens April 8 in the Mars Black Box Theater at the WYO. When I was contacted by the directors to come audition, I didn’t really know the play. It took me about 10 minutes of listening to some of the songs to say, “Absolutely yes — I will audition.”

I made my decision based on just what the play is reminding us. Even earlier in my development as an actor and theater artist, I was told that theater must be for the community in which it is being performed, meaning it must relate to them, or connect them with something beautiful in this world, and here “beautiful” can have a multitude of definitions. Overall, the theater must connect an audience with feelings they haven’t felt in a while, and get a chance to exercise them.

I know we’re probably all tired of hearing about the pandemic. Those of us who got through it fought some pretty tough battles, and the world often looked pretty bleak. I would suggest that for the better part of two years, we all got to experience just about as many negative feelings as we can. Not that I’m suggesting that we aren’t still feeling those now that the surge of the pandemic has subsided. But rather, I’m saying now that it has, and we can start living in a post-COVID world, we get a chance to take stock of what we *didn’t* lose during the pandemic.

Here’s some feelings you may have forgotten: the anxiety of meeting someone for the first time, with the mutual intent of determining the feasibility of being life partners, all determined over this initial meal or drink. The flashes of terror as red flags start to wave, and at any moment it could all end in disaster.

I’ll also remind you of what humor is on stage: it’s pain happening to someone else at that exact moment. It’s the pain of being insufferably human against a personal expectation of perfection. It’s watching the groom’s pants fall down on his wedding day. It’s the bucket of water poured over someone else’s head. Or, it’s watching two people stumble through a blind date.

Without spoiling too much, there isn’t too much heavy with “First Date.” It’s a fun night to leave the kids at home and have some good grown-up comedy. But, deeper than that, it’s just the kind of show we need right now. We need to be reminded that somewhere deep in us, we have things we didn’t lose during COVID, things that weren’t necessarily altered by COVID. We do have delight and joy, and we get to come into contact with them again.

So, I invite you to come share a date with us, and go home sufficiently connected with things you thought might be gone ... but they’re not.

I’ll see you at intermission (just kidding, we don’t have an intermission for this show)!

AARON ODOM is the managing and artistic director for Trident Theatre Company and produces the podcast “Euripides, Eumenides,” which can be found on any major podcast provider or at tridenttheatre.com.

ENTERTAINMENT FOR ALL



MATTHEW GASTON | THE SHERIDAN PRESS

Gail Sidletsky, left, checks in with Kathy Crump during a watercolor class at The Hub on Smith Thursday, March 31, 2022.

Sheridan organizations offer fun for seniors, fight social isolation

BY MARGARET O'HARA
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SHERIDAN — What does it mean to age well — to continue to live a fulfilling, entertaining life — long after reaching the age of 50 or 65? How can Sheridanites combat the social isolation that often accompanies growing older?

These are the questions event planners and wellness coordinators at many local organizations for seniors ask themselves every day to help seniors in Sheridan continue to live healthy, independent and just plain fun lives.

As folks continue to live longer, senior living has become a 30-, 40- or even 50-year time span, explained Lisa Wells, Senior Fun and Wellness Coordinator at The Hub on Smith. During this ever-extending time, Wells said incorporating entertainment into daily life keeps seniors physically, mentally and emotionally well and allows seniors opportunities to maintain their autonomy later in life.

“We have to think about this differently...” Wells said. “Let’s celebrate the next 50 years.”

The social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have also hit seniors particularly hard, Fun and Wellness Coordinator at The Hub Amanda Munford explained. The past two years have represented an enormous period of social isolation for seniors, particularly those at high risk for the virus. Some seniors in the Sheridan community have been truly isolated as a result of the virus since early 2020 and are still grappling with the effects of the virus on their lives, Munford said.

Social opportunities designed for seniors can combat that social isolation while ensuring seniors are able attend and enjoy the events, AARP Wyoming’s Sheridan Ambassador Stella Montano said. And several entities in Sheridan have committed to organizing these events and supporting seniors as they age.

AARP, for instance, hosted its first in-person event — a film screening at the WYO Performing Arts and Education Center Friday afternoon — since the beginning of the pandemic this week, Montano said. Although the organization was able to sponsor events, including Sheridan staples 3rd Thursday celebrations, Christmas Stroll and Veterans Day Activities, its ability to host was limited by COVID-19 pan-



Pat Harper, left, and Saskia Grody talk and joke with one another during a watercolor class at The Hub on Smith Thursday, March 31, 2022.



Ron Spahn works on a colorful landscape during a watercolor class at The Hub on Smith Thursday, March 31, 2022.

demographic restrictions.

AARP events are open to all, Montano said, but they’re designed with people older than 50 in mind. For example, Friday’s film screening was held in the afternoon to allow seniors to drive to the theater, which many may not have been able to do at night. The events are also free, removing any financial encumbrances to attendance.

Montano said these sorts of events are intended to combat

the isolation seniors often feel as a result of COVID-19, caregiving responsibilities or the loss of friends or family members.

“[We’re] just trying to make people feel good and know that they’re not forgotten,” Montano said.

Social events at The Hub serve a similar function, Wells explained. From cooking classes to impromptu games of dominoes, yoga to outdoor outings across Sheridan County, Wells and Munford agreed The Hub’s

programs serve seniors’ minds and bodies while offering a place to connect with others, often in similar life circumstances.

Even in exercise classes and gardening club meetings, Wells said, “The brain is getting a good workout as well.”

Like AARP, many of The Hub’s programs are free, low-cost or suggest contributions and open to all. Wells said she hopes to empower all Sheridan residents — of all ages and backgrounds — to see The Hub as their center and welcomes feedback or ideas for new programming.

But these organizations don’t provide entertainment to seniors alone. The Hub and AARP partner with organizations like Sheridan Community Land Trust, Sheridan County YMCA, city of Sheridan, Rooted in Wyoming and many more to make programs possible.

Volunteers, too, offer up hundreds of hours each year to The Hub, AARP and other local organizations dedicated to serving seniors. AARP is volunteer-led in Sheridan, and volunteers at the Hub’s Fun and Wellness Program donate 50 to 80 hours per month.

“This community is really welcoming in that way,” Munford said.

You can find out about local events for seniors at The Sheridan Press’ community calendar and The Hub’s events calendar.