

# Prose for All: CATF expands its viewing options for locals

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SHEPHERDSTOWN — Attention Eastern Panhandle residents: Plan to get your tickets soon.

But just as important, plan to get involved in the expanding opportunities designed for area residents at this year's summertime Contemporary American Theater Festival.

In addition to an expanded lineup of plays and showings this year, the CATF offers more free and discounted options to encourage local residents to attend or experience the nationally renowned repertory theater festival during its July on and off the campus of Shepherd University.

*"We do not want to be seen as elitist,"* said Ed Herendeen, CATF's founder and producing director. *"We want theater to be accessible and affordable for all people. We want to make it as easy as possible."*

Tickets are on sale now. However, area residents should consider that the CATF is offering free play preview events, free lectures and discussions, free play readings, Sunday night and weeknight ticket discounts, a large batch of free student tickets, as well as discounts for military members and their families. The festival even offers a few *"pay what you can"* theater performances, for which a penny can be plenty for an entrance fee.

Last year the CATF sold more than 14,000 tickets, drawing more than 2,500 visitors from 37 states, Canada and Africa. Those visitors filled the festival's three performance venues, as well as Shepherdstown's inns, restaurants, stores and nearby tourist attractions.

Festival officials estimate the event generates more than \$2 million into the local economy — a conservative calculation of economic stimulation that is nearly a decade old.

*“Shepherdstown is the oldest town in West Virginia doing the newest plays in America,”* Herendeen said. *“People are coming in groups.”*

Ten of the more than 100 performances of this year’s six first-running plays are already sold out, even though promotions for the 27th annual festival are just now kicking into high gear.

Significantly for area residents, more showings are taking place this year. For the first time, the CATF is increasing its lineup of plays running at the festival from five to six. The festival also added an extra day of Tuesday performances in three theaters that can collectively seat more than 700 people at one time.

With the CATF increasingly becoming a destination event for those pursuing in high-end cultural experiences, the festival’s extended performance schedule will encourage more visitors to stay longer in Shepherdstown and Jefferson County, Herendeen said. More people and groups are already staying several days to combine their CATF experience with other Eastern Panhandle sightseeing and recreation attractions.

*“We have developed an adventurous audience with an insatiable appetite for theater and the arts,”* Herendeen offered. *“We have really cultivated an audience with sophisticate tastes.”*

As a repertory theater event, the CATF is designed as an *“immersive experience”* that allows theater fans to see multiple plays in a single venue. People attending the festival can potentially see all six plays in two days.

The CATF specializes in showcasing contemporary plays that are being performed for the first time, many of which in the past have gone on to lengthy runs on Broadway and other major theater venues.

Most of the actors performing at CATF appear in more than one play, reflecting the festival's focus on high-caliber actors and substantive content over flashy big-name talent, Herendeen said. That the festival uses only unionized actors and theater professionals is another statement to the event's high-caliber professionalism, he added.

For people new to modern theater, or those without any theater experience, Herendeen encourages people to keep an open mind about the CATF's contemporary content style, which by design poses more questions for theater-goers than it offers ready answers.

*"We call it Talk Theater,"* Herendeen said. *"We call it Think Theater."*

That is what can and should be exhilarating about everyday life, Herendeen said. The opportunity to explore and discuss new human perspectives is a big part of the gift of having the CATF in Shepherdstown for area residents to enjoy.

*"We're making this very, very accessible to our local community,"* he added.

## **Festival Options**

### ***Free events***

— *Readings: July 11, 18, and 25 at 6 p.m.*

— *CATF in Context: July 8, 15, 22 and 29 at 10 a.m.*

— *Lectures: July 8, 15, 22 and 29 at 5 p.m.*

— *After Thoughts: July 15, 22, and 29 at 10pm.*

— *Gallery Talk (in Hagerstown, Md.): July 12 and 19 at 10 a.m.*

### ***Discounted events***

*– West Virginia residents receive a special \$35 rate for all performances on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.*

*– Sunday night tickets, for performances beginning after 4:30 p.m., are \$35 for everyone.*

*– Active and retired military members and their family members receive a \$35 ticket rate.*

*– A student discount is \$20 per ticket.*

*For more information, visit [www.catf.org](http://www.catf.org).*