

to *build & bind*
a community

In the summer of 1989, the Commonweal Theatre produced a two-show season of *Crimes of the Heart* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Thirty-five years later, that theatre company boasts a five-show season from April through December, has staged over 160 productions, and welcomed more than a half a million audience members through its doors. The Commonweal was a midsummer dream that, over time, became a reality and a true success story of what it takes to operate a small, professional theatre company anywhere. The staggering fact is that this success story unfolds where the Root River bends in a town of 724 in rural Minnesota.

As the Commonweal embarks on its 35th midsummer, we've asked Commonweal co-founder Eric Bunge and Janene Roessler, Lanesboro Arts Council member in the late 80's and current Commonweal season pass holder, to provide their thoughts and insight as to what sparked the dream along with what has sustained the Commonweal for so many years.

What was your dream for the summer of 1989?

Eric: My personal mission was, and remains, rural community transformation "for the common welfare" through the arts. I always considered Commonweal a community service organization first and a theater making enterprise second. I felt Commonweal needed to exist to build and bind the community.



Janene: To be honest, my vision didn't go much beyond raising funds to fix the leaky roof of the original St. Mane theater! When Eric Bunge approached us with his idea of using the theater and helping to maintain the building, we jumped on the opportunity.



Why do you think the Commonweal is still thriving 35 years later?

Janene: Commonweal continues to thrive because of wise and energetic leadership; local and State financial support; expertise in grant writing; and recruitment of an evolving crew of incredibly talented, hard-working, dedicated company members.

Eric: The Commonweal is still thriving 35 years after it started because the people who have the privilege to lead, work for, and volunteer for the organization try to be good and do good under the umbrella of the Commonweal and for the common welfare of people and the community...and that's how good things (like still being in existence) happen.

Describe your hopes for the next 35 years...

Eric: I simply hope the Commonweal continues to change the world for the better through its mission. It is my wish that the Commonweal will continue to dig deep into the human story because only that will resonate with what today's audiences are still experiencing - the marginalization of people because of their gender, ethnicity, race, etc.

Janene: As for the future, I have confidence that Commonweal will continue to offer a unique experience to all types of theater audiences. The company never stops amazing me.

With this letter, the *2023 Midsummer Giving Campaign* is now underway!

Making a donation today, of any amount, is the best way to ensure that your theatre company remains just as vibrant for the next generation of the Commonweal family. We say it all the time... *we could not do what we do without you*... and in this milestone of years, we hope you'll celebrate summer with us and help keep the Commonweal on strong, safe ground for many more years to come. Make your donation today by visiting www.CommonwealTheatre.org or by mailing a check to PO Box 15 Lanesboro, MN 55949.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you dear friends!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeremy van Meter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Jeremy van Meter
Director of Development