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68 Sykes Street North, Meaford
N4L 1R2
Telephone (519) 538-1421
Toll Free 1-866-771-6235
Fax (519) 538-5028
thamefordexpress@rogers.com

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More new innovation from the GTF

THE GEORGIAN THEATRE FESTIVAL CONTINUES TO AMAZE me. During a cold wet, summer that saw tourism numbers down all across the province, the GTF increased its ticket sales by 32.8 per cent, increased total ticket revenue by 46 per cent, and increased total attendance by 20.4 per cent.

Managing Artistic Director Lezlie Faith Wade is an organizing, artistic, innovative, theatrical dynamo. Since she arrived two years ago to salvage the troubled festival's 8th season, Lezlie has shown an ability to think outside the box while continuing to produce high quality professional summer theatre.

Her proposal for next year is a case in point.

If you haven't yet noticed, contractors have fenced off the opera house and have started the long awaited renovation of Meaford Hall. This presented a problem for the theatre festival: How do we keep building our momentum when our venue is under construction? Lezlie's answer?

The Georgian Theatre Festival will celebrate its "TENT" H season."

"Before we had any idea what we were going to do for our 2005 season, I suggested we call it our 9-1/2 summer in order to save the 10th season for the new venue," said Lezlie who was in town this weekend for another one of her innovative ideas - Page to Stage. "Then I thought, why not use a tent."

"It's celebratory. It's exciting. And if it's good enough for Stratford it's good enough for us."

After exploring several other options (the high school stage just doesn't cut it for a summer theatre experience) she investigated Barrie's Theatre by the Bay, which has been hugely successful over the past four years - in a tent.

The advantages of the tent are numerous. For the first time, the GTF would be accessible (no stairs), it would have comfortable seating close to the stage, it would allow them to sell matinees increasing the num-

ber of shows to eight a week, and it would be a new experience for theatre goers in the Georgian Bay area.

Not only that, it's a marketer's dream: "The TENT" H season!"

The Georgian Theatre Festival is steadily building its reputation and ticket base and the "TENT" H Season" will surely continue to build momentum.

Lezlie has been innovating since she started two years ago. This past summer, for the first time, the Georgian Theatre Festival sold one of its productions to another theatre. For the *Pleasure of Seeing Her Again*, starring Kevin Etherington and Elva Mai Hoover, toured the Capitol Theatre in Windsor. The money earned helped pay the production costs of the show and gave the GTF increased exposure.

The GTF has done a lot of things right in the last two years. It is still the only all-professional theatre in the southern Georgian Bay area, but it also has the cheapest ticket prices. The youth theatre program continues to thrive and this year members of the Young Company may be involved on the main stage. In fact, one member is considering joining Actor's Equity - "turning pro."

When Lezlie isn't coming up with new ideas for the GTF, she's working hard on other theatre projects across the province and the country.

This past summer she was guest director at the Bluewater Festival in Kincardine, she directed a play at the Waterloo Stage Theatre and directed and acted at Theatre Orangeville.

Her show, *Dickens's A Christmas Carol*, is being produced by the Carousel Theatre Company of Vancouver. The show is done with five actors and life-sized puppets, which Wade describes as "really creepy." "It's quite scary actually, the kids love it."

We're lucky to have someone with Lezlie's dedication, professionalism and personality helping make good things happen in our town.



Scott Woodhouse