

Hopewell valley neighbors



Sara Scully

Bringing People Together
at Hopewell Theater



Cover photo by Olga Kolleny



Best Version Media

A community magazine serving the residents of Hopewell Township, Pennington Borough and Hopewell Borough

Resident Feature





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Bringing People Together at Hopewell Theater

By Catherine Bialkowski | Photos by Olga Kolleeny

For Sara Scully, co-founder of the revitalized Hopewell Theater, bringing people together is the driving force behind her passion for the arts and creating. Originally from New Hope, Pennsylvania, and Boston, Massachusetts, Sara is an alumna of Bard College and has a Master of Arts in history from Tufts University.

“I started out my career working in nonprofit political issues, and by my late twenties I really wanted to do a career change to kind of hybridize my interest in progressive social change and the arts,” says Sara. So, she moved into documentary filmmaking. Sara worked in children’s educational television for over ten years, then, when she moved to Lambertville from Manhattan, decided she wanted to start a community film center. In 2008, Sara founded the ACME Screening Room, an independent cinema-art space, to bring her passion for film and community organizing together. She ran the theater for eight years.

In 2015, the investors who bought Hopewell Theater (Jon Mcconoughy, Liza Moorehouse and Mitchel Skolnick, Sara’s business partner) completely renovated the space, replacing the heating, electric, sound, and lighting systems and updating the plumbing system. Hopewell Theater, originally founded in 1880, has a long, rich history, and thus needed a bit of an update. The owners then reached out to Sara in the hopes of creating a vision for the theater which would breathe new life into it. Sara led the creative direction of the interior fit renovation, overseeing everything from design and branding to staffing and HR. The theater officially opened in 2017, and Sarah delivered her daughter, Natalie, two weeks later. “That’s how life is,” she says, laughing. “We plan, God laughs.” Sara says that she always knows how long the theater has been open, as it is the same age as her daughter.

Sara and Natalie

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The vision for Hopewell Theater, according to its website, is “a place where patrons can meet friends, and get inspired by an eclectic mix of entertainment by emerging and established talent in a setting that is welcoming, casual, intimate, and fun.” It is an art house for cinema, comedy, theater—all forms of performance. The theater also, of course, provides a stage for both emerging established artists to showcase their work.

Hopewell Theater has set the stage for local artists such as poet Paul Muldoon, singer/songwriter and guitarist Chris Harford, and singer/songwriter Danielia Cotton; it has also hosted other nationally recognized acts such as the Allman Betts Band and Bread and Puppet Theater.

Calling it “casually elegant,” Sara says Hopewell Theater is meant to be a place to enjoy time with friends, eat, drink wine, and meet new people—without necessarily having to fit into the identity of a “theater person.” Hopewell Theater is for anyone and everyone. “We were definitely intentional about the design,” says Sara, who says the most important part of the design for her was to create a place that was warm, welcoming, and intimate. *Hamish*, Sara calls it; this is a Yiddish word meaning having the qualities associated with home. “I want people to feel like anyone has a place at Hopewell Theater,” she says, “to feel transported, but right at home.”

To add to the hominess of the experience, Hopewell Theater has dine-in seating, offering a combination of booths, tables, counter-tops, and theater seating. There is a catering kitchen that serves small plates, and the theater has partnered with The Peasant Grill and other local businesses for special events. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Hopewell Theater’s owners purchased The

Brothers Moon, which is located near the property, and plan to renovate and open it in conjunction with the theater.

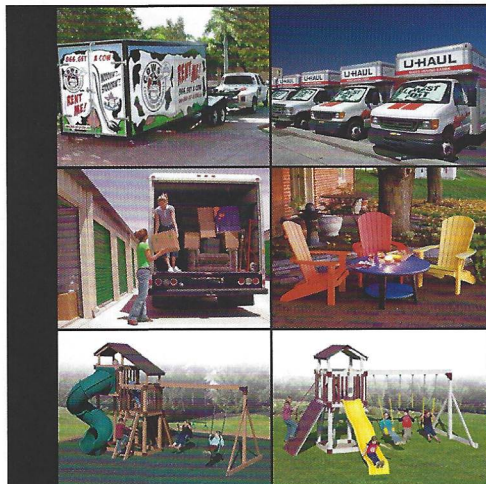
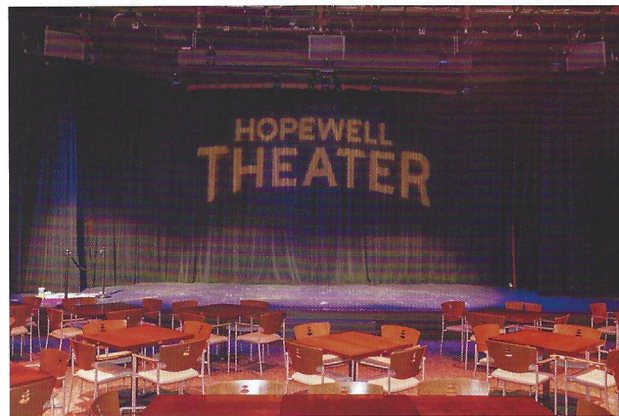
The pandemic, of course, curbed the plans of Hopewell Theater and countless other businesses across the world; but Sara points out one consequence of the quarantine that changed the way many people viewed the arts, particularly live performance. “People finally got what was supposedly the world’s promise of digital media,” says Sara. “People got to be on the internet for everything. We found out really quickly how much we loved live music, live performance, and coming together through those things. There was deep grief over not being able to be together, not being able to see each other there.”

Sara expresses gratitude toward NJ’s Governor and Legislators who passed the \$7.5 million in CARES relief funds for non profit arts and the \$17.5 million Community Stage Relief Grant Program for for profit venues, a “lifeline” for venues and presenters struggling financially due to COVID-19. Hopewell Theater is excited to reopen on September 10.

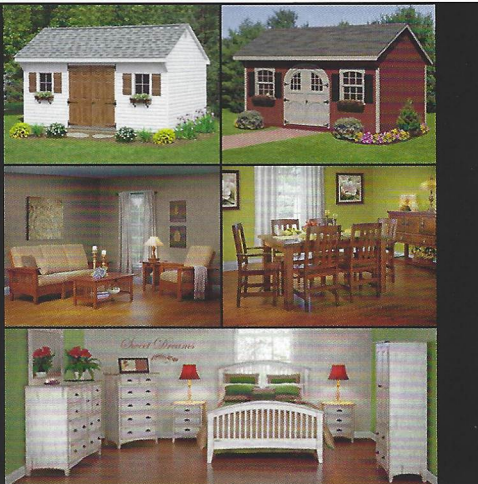
Although inevitably a lover of performing arts, Sara says that what really drives her is not just a passion for theater, but for bringing people together in the presence of such art.

She calls it her *raison d’être*. “It’s not enough to just put on a show, you have to give people an experience. You are competing with the digital world. I love bringing people together to have an experience. Seeing them before and after the show, sitting with friends, meeting new friends, meeting the artist; it’s such an inspiring thing.”

You can learn more about Hopewell Theater and purchase tickets at hopewelltheater.com.




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