



Arts In Your Back yard

# Mother's PRIDE

*Wagon Train Project  
brings big city art  
to a small city setting*

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Staff writer

While most mothers receive cards and small gifts for Mother's Day, Amy Lamphere received the opportunity of a lifetime.

Lamphere and her family had moved back to Nebraska from New York, where she had worked promoting the works of emerging artists.

She began working at the Lied Center, but in 1993 her husband gave her the chance to do what she missed the most: work with artists and performers in an intimate setting.

It was then that the Wagon Train Project, a non-profit organization, was brought to life.

Lamphere's husband incorporated the name and gave it to Lamphere as a surprise for Mother's Day.

"We started out just doing small projects," Lamphere said. "It kind of started as a hobby. But soon we began to ask ourselves, 'Where do we want to go with this?'"

It didn't take much time for Lamphere to decide what direction she was heading.

She began bringing in artists and performers for residencies

that lasted an average of one to six weeks.

"I still had contacts with colleagues from my previous jobs," Lamphere said. "So I would use those contacts to get performers that might not otherwise come to Lincoln."

"The Wagon Train Project is a unique gift for the Lincoln community. We have an aesthetic appreciation and are funded nationally by people who value what we are doing here, which is helping to teach the community about the arts."

Lamphere believes that what sets the WTP apart from other area art promoters is that it is a value-based organization. It thrives on the belief that the artist comes first. The Wagon Train is there to decide how to present the artist to the community.

They achieve this by giving audiences a more personal view of the artist.

"We only have enough space for 100 to 150 people," she said. "There is contact between the audience and the artist. For people who are used to seeing performers from 50 feet away, this can be scary and shocking, but we want to demystify all those performance artist myths."

Audience members are also invited to talk with the artists after the shows. Lamphere said that giving people the opportunity to understand the artist allows them to also understand the artist's work.

Many of the artists brought into the commu-

nity by the WTP have not had exposure in Lincoln but are popular in other communities.

"Our community does not have much of a history of new works coming in," Lamphere said. "Wagon Train brings in artists on the way up in their careers. We enjoy presenting fresh, new ideas to the community, instead of being redundant."

One of the performances Lamphere remembers most is a group from Croatia. The group, made up of young people, had put together a play reflecting its members' lives and the hardships they faced during the ongoing war in the Balkans.

"Violence was a part of their upbringing," Lamphere said. "This was their story, and it was more powerful than anything CNN can show you."

The Wagon Train did not market the performance publicly. Instead, fliers were sent out to about 100 people. Despite that, the WTP packed in a full house of 200 people for the performance.

"It was a performance that touched your heart," Lamphere said. "It was so troubling and violent. It was not the happiest story, but it profoundly moved me."

Recently, most of the projects the WTP has done focus more on the Lincoln community.

One of Lamphere's favorite past projects was the "Family Project" with the David Dorfman Dance Company.

Lamphere had known Dorfman before the project. Three years earlier, she had invited him to come to Lincoln to produce another project, titled the "Athlete Project."

While in Lincoln, Dorfman had told Lamphere and her husband that he had

begun researching families. It was from there that the idea evolved.

"I think the success that I have working with the Wagon Train is that Amy and I have very similar interests," Dorfman said. "Everything has begun with us conversing about ideas that are mutually interesting."

For the "Family Project," Dorfman held auditions in Lincoln. Out of 70 people, 17 were chosen to be in the performance, which centered on the lives of those families.

"I remember Tom Thayer and I were in Lincoln for the auditions," Dorfman said. "We had our hands full. It was a cathartic afternoon, but it was also a great surprise. I think that speaks highly of Amy and the Wagon Train's reputation."

Nancy Marshall, a local artist and arts educator who has been both a performer and an audience member at the WTP, remembers the Dorfman show.

"It was really powerful," she said. "I had a very shy friend who was chosen to be in the show, and it changed her life. That's not a small thing."

Marshall has worked as a curator for a jazz series put on by the WTP and has also produced two of her own shows.

"I think that the shows the WTP puts on are cutting-edge art," she said. "There are some that might work, and some that might fall on their faces. It's more of what happens in the bigger cities."

Marshall also said that, as an artist, going to the shows constantly stimulates her own work.

"I'll go to a show and see what the performer is doing, and I'll think 'Hey! That's what I have been thinking this whole time!'"

Please see WAGON on 12

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AMY LAMPHERE  
Wagon Train Project director



Amy Lamphere, pictured with her daughter Sarah, has made the Wagon Train Project a cutting-edge arts promoter, funding programs and artists in Nebraska and nationwide.