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Theatre group to challenge thinking on green space

A theatre group in Millbrook, Ontario, has begun to develop a play to challenge people's thinking about green space.

Set in the future, The Green Hill is a satire about what happens when only one green space is left on the planet. "First, cowboys are back," reads a description about the drama.

Robert Winslow, a writer of the play, along with Dale Hamilton, says the drama is a kind of "spaghetti Western*," with a small group of hill dwellers fighting to protect that last piece of green from the powers that be. It is a "humorous examination of the changes that small-town, Ontario residents are facing and fighting," reads the play-description.

The Green Hill is set to be performed sometime in 2008. Scenes from the drama will be presented in March, 2007, at the Peterborough Centennial Museum and Archives.

Winslow, who is also founder and artistic director at the 4th Line Theatre, is using the drama to create and present an alternative vision about the use and abuse of green space in his area.

"We have to keep reminding people of the value of our heritage and of green spaces," he says.

It's an issue in which he has more than an artistic interest. Winslow is also a member of Greenhills Community Vision, a local a local group focused on protection of the Cavan-Millbrook-North Monaghan Township's cultural, environmental and historical features.

The group is currently fighting the development of about 250 acres of prime agricultural land near Millbrook.

Winslow says that basically the game is stacked against the group as well as farmers who wish to preserve the land. “[The farmers] just can’t be competitive,” he says. “It’s sad.”

“We need to promote people being able to farm. And we need to promote goods being consumed by people in their own community.”

He says that one way to do this is to present that alternative vision and to think about what’s of value long-term.

“With farmers, they’re thinking of three generations down the road. With the development industry, they’re just coming in, doing their thing, and then they’re gone.”

Winslow says it’s hard for the community to continue resisting the pressure to develop but that with letter-writing, electing candidates with an interest in these issues, and dramas, hopefully some impact can be made.

The 4th Line Theatre was founded in 1992 just outside of Millbrook. Century-old barns make up the permanent sets. The mandate of the theatre, as described on its Web site, is to “preserve and promote our Canadian cultural heritage through the development and presentation of regionally based, environmentally staged historical drama”.

*A Spaghetti Western is a nickname for a broad sub-genre of Western film that emerged in the mid-1960s, so named because most of them were produced by Italian studios. (Wikipedia Encyclopedia)