Theatre is, ultimately, a team sport.

Spend even a few minutes with Emily Sutton-Smith, and it's obvious the College of Arts and Letters alumna is thrilled that the Williamston Theatre, approaching its 10th anniversary season (2015-2016) producing professional live theatre, has found a capable partner in the Michigan State University Department of Theatre.

An actress, singer, producer and Williamston Theatre's development director, Sutton-Smith says that the partnership between the Equity theatre and the MSU theatre department is as much about being part of the community and giving back as it is about providing opportunities to MSU theatre students and fostering the next generation of theatre professionals.

"The way it works," Sutton-Smith says, "is MSU theatre students come and work in our theatre as actors, designers, or production assistants. In the process, they get to work with veteran stage actors doing their craft. I've always felt that there's no better education. It's such a great complement to MSU's Department of Theatre."

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"Then, they come to Williamson Theatre and get to watch someone who has been doing this for 30 years, actually be on stage with them, and share that moment," she says. "This includes professionals who've been in hundreds of shows; who bring that wisdom and experience on stage with them."

"And what's really cool is that many of these professionals don't have any connection to MSU. But they like our students and love working with them, helping them understand the value of collaboration and nurturing the creative process."

"After all, theatre is, ultimately, a team sport. We all rely on each other." And that's precisely what the Williamston Theatre's four founding theatre professionals, John Lepard, Tony Caselli, Christine Purchis and Sutton-Smith have been doing since 2004 when they decided to "create a theatre for, by and about people in this part of the world."

"The four of us were all working in professional theatre in Michigan," Sutton-Smith says, "and had met each other while working at the Purple Rose in Chelsea. When John moved to Williamston, he got the idea to start a professional theatre company. He got Tony on board, Tony brought Chris on board, and John brought me on board."

Sutton-Smith adds that the four eagerly offered up their particular skills, and, before long, had chosen Williamston as the location for their small, not-for-profit, professional live theatre company with Lepard as executive director, Caselli as artistic director, Purchis as managing director and Sutton-Smith as development director.

Throughout 2005, the four founders worked to develop their business plan, secure support for the project and raise awareness in the community. In late 2005, local business leader Steve Zynda of Cardinal Fabricating pledged to support the theatre by underwriting its facility expenses. Williamston Theatre staged its first production in 2006.

"For years, students who graduated and who grew up in Michigan and still had family here felt they had to move to Chicago, New York City or Los Angeles to find work. Now, when they realize that they're in a region where there's work, they can see that the survival part is easier and more likely. In the end, we get more of the creative class to stay."
to find work. Now, Chicago, New York City or Los Angeles "For years, students who graduated and groceries, and paying taxes. who's working is buying gas and throughout Michigan. And everyone There are strong professional theatres stage; we're only one piece of the pie.

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opportunity for students to earn Equity theatre, there is the huge Williamston Theatre is a professional Sutton-Smith says. "And we've add to the overall enrichment of O!='

Emily adds that the job creation aspect get more of the creative class to stay." work, they can see that the survival part that they're in a region where there's incredible plus for MSU theatre and, Sutton-Smith says, because get more of the creative class to stay. tutitons and helps them get jobs in, the community and Williamston add to the overall enrichment of after graduation, the students truly in, the Midwestern voice in live theatre," Sutton-Smith says. "And we've the vitality and economic health of theatre Wing recognized Williamston Theatre in 2014 as one of the top 12 Theatre as the Chamber Member of Commerce named Williamston y Greater Lansing area. That same.

JOURNAL received the prestigious Robert 2008, the Theatre's four founders production of Doubt, John Patrick Shanley." During its first full season, the new works by Michigan playwrights, has produced 11 world premieres of

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www.williamstontheatre.org Williamston Theatre website at upcoming productions, visit the about the company and their Company Grant Award.

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