MSU & GOODSPEED:
THIS PRICE IS RIGHT
Asked what it feels like to be retiring at the end of 2014 from his executive director position with Goodspeed Musicals in Connecticut after nearly half a century, MSU alumnus Michael Price says, “Scary…” then pauses before adding, “schizophrenic and slightly out of body. I’ve been in this office 46 years. I don’t really know how I should feel.”

But Price is a bit clearer about his future plans, and notes that there is one thing he won’t be doing: hanging around.

“It’s time for someone else to carry on,” he says. “As a philosopher once said, ‘It is not always up to you to complete the job, but you must start it.’ We began planning for the day that I would step down some 10-12 years ago. So a search firm and committee will handle a nationwide search for a new executive director.

“As for me, I hired a Yale consultant to help me through the transition, and have been advised that it’s best if I step back and keep my mouth shut.”

A statement by the Goodspeed trustees notes, however, that Price will remain in advisory and fundraising roles through 2016. And Michael says he sees a future role in helping to build the organization’s board.

THEATRE INTERNSHIP FUNDING

Price is also staying connected to the College of Arts and Letters and MSU. He is personally funding an annual MSU Department of Theatre internship at Goodspeed Musicals, with the first student having begun in August 2014.

Michael says that he worked with (Department of Theatre Chair and professor of scene design) Kirk Domer and (professor and head of acting and directing) Rob Roznowski to establish the position that will rotate among the various professional theatre positions and each intern’s interests and major(s) such as acting, choreography, direction, scene design, stage management, etc.

MSU CONNECTION

But then, Price’s association with MSU predates even his long association with Goodspeed Musicals. He received a B.A. in TV and Radio from MSU in 1960.

“There was nothing, and yet, everything to learn after leaving MSU,” Price says, “because MSU taught me how to ask questions, how to listen and how to learn—the basics of how to apply knowledge.”

To that end, Michael followed up his MSU education with an M.A. from the University of Minnesota, and a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) from the Yale School of Drama.

And, in April 2013, Michael was honored as one of four Distinguished Alumni during the College of Arts and Letters 50th Anniversary Gala at the University Club on the East Lansing campus.

GOODSPEED HISTORY

Goodspeed Musicals, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and advancement of musical theater and the creation of new works, was formed in 1959 (the year before Michael Price graduated from MSU) to restore the Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut, to its original Victorian appearance.
The online Wikipedia entry for Michael Price notes that:

“Price first joined Goodspeed Musicals for the company’s first season in 1963, but left after a year...”

“Early in his career, Price was a stagehand and electrician at the Shubert Theater in New Haven, Connecticut. He also served as executive producer of the 3,500-seat Valley Music Hall in Salt Lake City, Utah, the original stage manager for Richard Rodgers’ Music Theater of Lincoln Center, and the production stage manager for Andy Williams, Henry Mancini and the Osmonds. As a lighting designer, he was responsible for the lighting at President Lyndon B. Johnson’s inaugural gala; for Josephine Baker on Broadway; and for the premiere American tour of the Hungarian National Ballet.

“In 1968, Price returned to Goodspeed as the theatre’s executive director—a role he has held continuously since then—with the goal of saving the then-struggling organization.”

Says Price, “I had just opened Lincoln Center as stage manager, which, along with the Salt Lake City position, helped mature me enough to take on the executive director role at Goodspeed.”

Under Price’s direction, Goodspeed has produced more than 250 musicals, exported 19 productions to Broadway—most famously Annie, Man of La Mancha, and Shenandoah—and produced 72 world premieres.

Continues Wikipedia:

“Under his leadership, Goodspeed became the only theatre to ever receive two special Tony Awards for outstanding achievement. Price accepted the first special award on Goodspeed’s behalf in 1980. He accepted the second—the Regional Theatre Tony Award—in 1995. Goodspeed productions produced by Price have earned 13 Tony Awards and 33 Tony nominations.

“We’ve had extraordinary growth from $300,000 a year to between a 13- and 15-million-dollar-per-year operation...”

“At a masthead editorial published in The Hartford Courant on January 13, 2014, credited Price’s ‘inspired leadership’ of Goodspeed for saving the institution and ‘making the Goodspeed a major center of musical theater.’

As for other honors and activities, Michael Price is a recipient of the State of Connecticut Arts Award for service to the arts, and is chairman of the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. He serves as the treasurer of the American Theatre Wing and is a member of the Tony management committee. Price is also founder of The League of Historic Theatres, having served as its first president.

Price is proud to say that he has been married 43 years to Jo-Ann Nevas Price. They live in a 1746 farmhouse in Chester, about four miles from East Haddam, and also own a New York City apartment. The couple has two children, Daniel and Rebecca, and a grandson, Ezra.

EXTRAORDINARY GROWTH

Over the years, Price says he has “been given carte blanche at Goodspeed” to do what he thought needed to be done. “When I took over in 1968, we were an eight-week summer stock operation. There have been a lot of ups and downs since then; thankfully, more ups than downs.

“We’ve had extraordinary growth from $300,000 a year to between a 13- and 15-million-dollar-per-year operation; and acquired a nice endowment, and a vast amount of real estate. We just completed building 17 new houses, so we now have all the housing we need to house three full casts; that’s 80 bedrooms—with baths!

“Add to that our 28 acres and 33 buildings including the Opera House here in East Haddam and the Norma Terris Theatre in Chester; a 30,000-square-foot production facility; huge paint, scene and metalworking shops; our costume rental business, library and music department, and you can see why you need a lot of energy to be in this business.”

Thoughtfully and softly, Price adds, “But it gives a lot back; it gives a lot back.

“And I think I’ve got a lot more back than I gave.”