

Happy Days, A New Musical
Director's Vision
Gordon Greenberg

1. What drew you to work at Goodspeed?

Working at Goodspeed is like coming home to family — which is especially fitting, given the subject matter of *Happy Days, A New Musical*. Just as the show is all about how we become our best selves thanks to family and friends, the wonderful staff at Goodspeed enables artists to do their best work through their support and friendship. It is a rare treat to be surrounded by every conceivable resource and a team of passionate, creative and kind people. Developing a new musical is a long and varying path, and you try to afford yourself every advantage possible. I am glad and grateful to be back at Goodspeed.

2. What are you looking forward to when you are working at Goodspeed?

I am truly looking forward to the singularity of focus on the show. Living and working in such close proximity means that there are few distractions – apart from the beautiful view of the Connecticut River. Having begun development of *Happy Days* last summer at The Norma Terris Theatre, it will be particularly gratifying to continue that process in East Haddam at the Opera House. Of course, I'm also looking forward to dinners at the Gelston House and La Vita!

3. What is your vision for the show you are directing at Goodspeed?

When I think of *Happy Days*, I think of Tuesday evenings in my suburban basement, eager to welcome the Cunninghams into my house. They were the ideal American family – polite, cheerful, always ready with a solution – and nothing like any of the families I knew. This was pure escape. It was mashed potatoes and a warm pie cooling outside the window. It may have been a soundstage, but it was full of heart and it sure felt like home.

Of course, I was not alone in my connection to the show. A staggering percentage of the country was watching with me. According to the Neilson ratings, more than half of all Americans watching television were tuned into *Happy Days*. That amounted to about 50 million viewers. Compare that to a current number one rated television show, which has only about 10 million viewers. The show became one of the country's most popular cultural reference points. Its characters became icons, and the friendship between Richie and Fonzie emerged as the cornerstone of the series. According to Frank Rich (*Time Magazine*, December 12, 1977), "As *Happy Days* grows older, the relationship between the bad boy hero Fonzie and the good boy hero Richie is becoming TV's own version of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer." That relationship also provides the foundation of the musical.

In creating a new musical inspired by the series, Garry Marshall and Paul Williams put that famously unshakable friendship to the test. When it is challenged, the friends are forced to examine their ideas of what loyalty and, ultimately, home means to them. Many of the other characters experience a similar journey. It may take a little questioning, but they all find that the answers they need are right in their own back yards - that there's a great comfort in belonging to a community.

And the *Happy Days* community was always alive with music. At Arnold's Malt Shop, the 'center of all communication,' there was always a jukebox playing or a local band performing between the payphone and the pinball machine. It was the heart and soul of the series and it remains at the heart of the musical.

It is the music, humor, and humanity of the beloved *Happy Days* characters that transports us back to a time less cluttered by information – when dinner was at six, bed time was at nine, and a friend was for life. Many lived that reality, and many of us lived it in front of the television on Tuesday nights, but it's equally joyous to recall. This show is a Valentine to the era, the series and the homes we grew up in!