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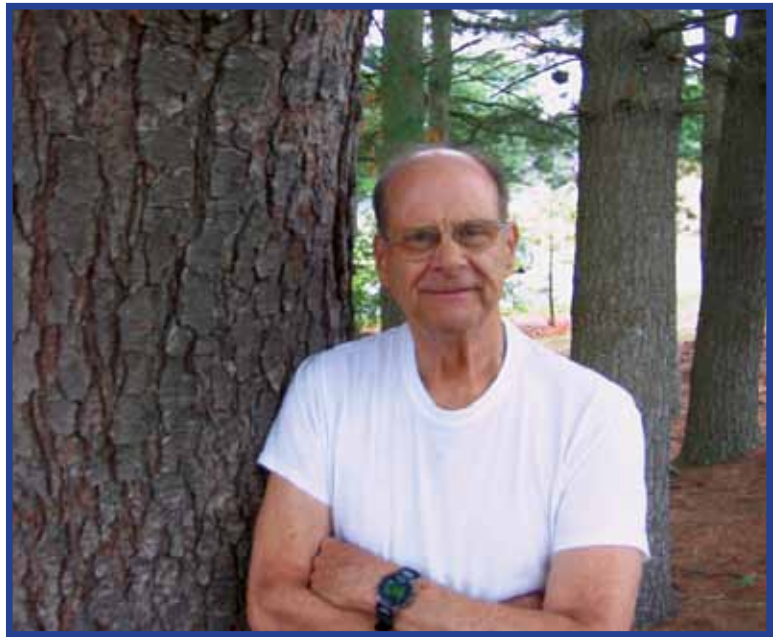
## Tittle 'feeling fine' when it's time for 'Liberty!'

ELIZABETHTON – Sycamore Shoals feels like home to Richard Tittle.

Ask him how he's doing and the answer is always the same: "Boy, I feel fine, especially when I'm coming here."

And Tittle makes others feel fine as well, having become one of the key ingredients in *Liberty!*, Tennessee's official outdoor drama, that continues its 32nd season through July 31, with performances Thursdays-Saturdays beginning nightly at 7:30.

After his retirement 10 years ago, Tittle decided to drop by the historic area one night and see the outdoor drama. He encountered old friend and longtime cast member Jim Bishop.



**Richard Tittle has been a member of the cast of 'Liberty!' for 10 years.**

"I just loved it. I asked Jimmy, 'How do I get in this thing?' He said, 'Just come on down and dress out.' So the next night, I was here, put on the costume and went out as a walk-on. I've been here every night since then."

Tittle has played several variations on a couple of roles, soon becoming one of the lead players with his portrayal of Abednego Chamberlain, a tart-tongued character full of quips and comebacks.

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“I’m playing myself,” Tittle says with a laugh. “It couldn’t be written any better. My favorite part of it is that my character is a composite – I can be anybody I want to be.”

A native of Erwin, Tittle has called Elizabethton home since he moved there with his family before World War II.

“My family were like nomads. We moved wherever there was work to be found in those years. We lived for a time in North Carolina, both in Winston-Salem, then in Mount Airy.

“Then we wound up in Indiana, Pennsylvania. Yes, that’s right,” he says with a grin. “The hometown of Jimmy Stewart. That, in fact, is where I saw my first movie. I was about 5 at the time.

“And sitting back there in the back was none other than the great movie star himself. He was a tall, lanky fellow and I think he couldn’t quite fit into the seats, so he was in the back on the aisle. I just walked right up to him, and he smiled and said, ‘Hello, little fellow.’ My mother almost fainted.”

Stewart would “come home on occasion. I saw him a few times. There were a couple of fellows building a prototype airplane and I believe he was interested in it.” Stewart stopped making movies to join the U.S. Army Air Corps during the war, flying a number of missions over Europe and rising to the rank of brigadier general.

Tittle’s path also led him to the military – he served in the U.S. Army, becoming a captain prior to his discharge – but to Elizabethton first. He went to work for Max Jett at the old Burgie Drug Store.

“He liked the way I typed out labels,” Tittle says with a grin. “But that man paid for my college education. You think I was going to say, ‘Thanks for the education and I’ll be seeing you’? No way,” Tittle answers his own question. “I stayed with him until he died.

‘What the people here did back then was just unbelievable. The sacrifices they made. They had no idea what they did. For a time, the fate of the United States, if not the whole damn world, rested in their hands. And, man, did they ever come through.’

**Richard Tittle**

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While getting that education, Tittle signed up for a history class that included a section about Sycamore Shoals. “You know, I don’t think the professor even knew that the place was here. She talked about it as though it were somewhere else. And that’s a sad truth we’ve had to deal with. So many people just don’t know about Sycamore Shoals.

“This place is incredible. It’s the most valuable thing we’ve got. It is the most famous unknown story in the country. It’s under-known and under-appreciated. Everyone who went west and opened this country up came right through here. Some of them stayed for a while.

“When we were little, we would go out on the river and play at what we called ‘the rapids.’ There were arrowheads everywhere. We’d pick up the broken ones and skip them across the water. All the while, we didn’t have any idea how important all this ground was, or what that river really meant,” Tittle said.

“What the people here did back then was just unbelievable. The sacrifices they made. They had no idea what they did. Some of the leaders – John Sevier, William Campbell, John Carter – they may have known. For a time, the fate of the United States, if not the whole damn world, rested in their hands. And, man, did they ever come through.”

*(Liberty! runs Thursdays-Saturdays through July 31, in the Fort Watauga Amphitheater at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area in Elizabethton. Performances begin nightly at 7:30. Tickets are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors, and \$8 for students. Children 5 and under are admitted free. For more information, call SSSHA at [423] 543-5808 or visit [www.liberty-drama.com](http://www.liberty-drama.com)).*



**Richard Tittle’s character Ab Chamberlain, left, banter with Allen Sellars’ John Carter in a scene from ‘Liberty!.’**

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