It’s hard to imagine that a strip of land that extends 70 miles, and has a year-round population of only 28,100 would consider itself a mecca for the arts. But, then again, Door County isn’t your typical sleepy rural community. Rather, it is one of the Midwest’s premier tourism destinations, attracting more than 2 million visitors per year. And, of course, many of those tourists want to enjoy arts and culture. Door County, which is comprised of many townships, islands and inlets north of Green Bay is the “thumb” protruding from the lower east side of Wisconsin along Lake Michigan. Among the cultural institutions here, are multiple playhouses, museums, and more than 100 smaller galleries. Additionally, free, live music can be found five nights a week at six venues, as part of Concerts in the Park. Nonetheless, it’s still hard to imagine that one non-profit theatre “in a garden” can accommodate 621 guests. That’s almost the size of the entire town in which it resides. Fish Creek, Wisconsin. But, Peninsula Players is a popular destination. It has been a part of Door County’s cultural scene since 1935, offering more than 500 plays in 84 seasons. In fact, this is the oldest professional resident summer theatre in the country. As such, people return to these comfortable theatre seats year after year. Some, generation after generation. What makes the theater experience even more special is its setting in the woods. The theater is designed with walls that can slide open to better appreciate the natural surroundings. Peninsula Players is a gem of a playhouse set on 16 forested acres along the shores of Green Bay. To stave off chilly nights, the theater has radiant floor heat. Finally, given the structure of the state of the art contemporary pavilion, designed by an award-winning Milwaukee architectural firm, no performance has ever been canceled because of the weather. Each season, Peninsula Players unveils five new productions, from comedy, to who-dun-it to thought provoking. Greg Vinkler, the company’s artistic director, selects a diverse variety of plays to feature each season. “If an audience member saw all five shows (which many do), I would like each experience to be completely different.” Vinkler, an actor based out of Chicago, has performed in 51 productions during his 31 years here. Additionally, he directs several of the shows each summer, and surrounds himself with award-winning talent. From Actors’ Equity Association actors, regional designers and stage managers. When not in Door County, Company members work in regional theaters from Los Angeles to New York, as well as in TV and film. “The artists of the 2019 company are exceptionally talented and very versatile,” praises Vinkler. Among those is Chicago-based Penny Slusher. Slusher is appearing in three of the Peninsula Players’ 2019 productions: “A Murder Is Announced” (July 10-28), “Silent Sky” (August 21-September 1) and “George Washington’s Teeth” (September 4-October 20), a zany comedy. In addition to her frequent roles in Chicago theatre, including the Writers Theatre, The Goodman, Northlight and Steppenwolf, she has acted at festivals in Australia and Ireland, and has several movies in her list of credits. Like many of the Peninsula Players actors, she enjoys spending summers in Wisconsin. “Door County is host to more than a few top-notch theatres,” she says. “If folks are unaware of that, then I would highly recommend attending a production here. This is an ideal spot for enjoying theatrical experiences because these venues are surrounded by the great outdoors – a perfect blend of art and nature.” This is Slusher’s third season with Peninsula Players. She notes that the theatre has a long history of attracting talented actors, directors, designers, and of course actors. “On a par with any you may find in Chicago, New York, or London,” she adds. A tad larger than Peninsula Player’s pavilion, with 725 seats, is the Door County Auditorium in Fish Creek. Open since 1991, this summer’s lineup features Roseann Cash, Mavis Staples, Lyle Lovett and the Righteous Brothers. Other nearby cultural venues are American Players Theatre in Spring Green, Northern Sky Theatre in Ephraim, Third Avenue Playhouse in Sturgeon Bay, and Birch Creek Summer and Fall Concert Series. Visit the Door County Wisconsin Visitors Bureau for an up to date listing of cultural events.