

Students try out tinsel

Teachers double as film extras

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Tom Krupka, a Farmington High School chemistry teacher, found himself in the Hotel Pontchartrain facing a line of young women anxiously hanging onto his every word.

"Do I have the right look, Tom?" they asked somewhat nervously, unaware that Krupka had an equal case of the jitters. It's not every day that he helps cast a movie.

In this case, the movie was the "Betsy", which follows the progress of an automobile company and its executives from the turbulent Thirties through the uncertain Seventies. Krupka and several other Farmington teachers and students volunteered to be extras in the movie and gain a chance to share part of the camera with Sir Laurence Olivier, Leslie Ann Downs ("Upstairs Downstairs") and Tommy Lee Jones ("The Amazing Howard Hughes").

As in Krupka's case most of the dreams of sharing the spotlight with a star translated into the reality of rubbing shoulders with other extras and the wardrobe supervisors.

HIS STINT IN CASTING began with an effort to get himself into the movie as an extra. The first day the Detroit area casting director Jeanne Carpenter set up shop, Krupka called her.

"I'm 29 and I'm not doing anything and I want to be hired," he remembers telling her.

He was hired but he was drawn into double duty when Ms. Carpenter complained that she was having trouble recruiting 25 men. Four hours later, Krupka had assembled that number from the ranks of fellow Farmington teachers and students. After that success he was called in to help cast young women to be Vassar students in a scene shot at Cranbrook School, West Bloomfield.

"I felt like King Kong. I was in seventh heaven," said Krupka, who admits he's star struck. "My wife was there and she was having a ball watching me be nervous."

From the 60 women who waited several hours to be cast, 36 were chosen for the college campus scene. Originally the same cast of extras was to have been in two scenes, one at Cranbrook and one at Metropolitan Airport, but since there were so many persons trying out, Ms. Carpenter sent the remaining hopefuls to the airport.

Among the Vassar coeds and professors were Marianne Krupka and Glen Gearhart.

MRS. KRUPKA, 30, was talked into trying out for the scene by her husband.

"It was interesting to see what was going on. It was hard, somewhat tedious work," she said.

After several walks across campus as a Vassar student, Mrs. Krupka quit counting. She's sure the group must have made about 30 trips across the lawn while mouthing conversation and trying to be silent and animated at the same time.

"We couldn't talk on camera. We



TOM KRUPKA

pretended we were talking. Eventually, we ran out of things to say," she said.

One of her audition line cohorts was Karen Gearhart, whose husband Glen, teaches at North Farmington High School. She was deemed too old to be a Vassar girl and too young to play an older professor. Eventually, she played a plane passenger in the scenes shot at Metro Airport. Her husband was chosen to be a professional type in the Cranbrook scenes.

"He was dressed for fall 74, so he

sweltered in a vested suit," she said.

Gearhart's scene was repeated ten times. Scenes were repeated when an airplane flew overhead and drowned out the dialogue and when a coeds' heels clicked against the pavement.

"They paid great attention to detail," Mrs. Gearhart said.

ONCE, IN THE middle of a scene, two boys who were visiting the campus called out to each other just before the two principal actors went into a clinch.

"You going fishing?" one boy yelled.

"No. I don't have any weights," his friend answered, according to Mrs. Gearhart. The scene was done over.

She was luckier than her husband. Her scene allowed her to sit in an airplane without air conditioning between 11:50 p.m. and 1:50 a.m. On film the scene will last two minutes.

"I started getting that mildew smell," she said. "Many of the extras were falling asleep in their seats while preparations were being made."

Each of her fellow passengers on the stationary DC-10 were asked to bring along some carry-on luggage.

One extra brought a hat with pom-poms, another carried a traveling box for animals labeled "Mayflower Hotel Flying Chicken," and a third hauled around a guitar case filled with sandwiches and fruit.

Most of the evening was spent waiting for the crew to arrive. They had been held up at Cranbrook and took a late dinner break.

"I ARRIVED at Metro about six. There were no signs of cameras. About 7:15 p.m., a man in blue jeans

and a denim shirt showed up and said they're still filming and the casts needs its dinner and it'll be a while but don't wander too far from the airport. We were a little aloof with each other at first but we all knew why we were there so after a while we started making small talk," she said.

They knew the cast had arrived when they spied Leslie Ann Downs in a "outlandish outfit" being followed by a woman in tight black slacks and a matching pointed Japanese style straw hat. The wardrobe mistress was fussing and smoothing Ms. Downs' costume as they made their way to the plane, according to Mrs. Gearhart.

Other Farmington extras got a chance to be in scenes with Sir Laurence Olivier. Farmington High School drama coach Ves Spindler and English teacher Gene Schoeneich were in the background for some of Olivier's scenes.

Spindler played an auto executive who walked by Olivier's car in a scene depicting the auto lock-outs of the Thirties.

"Olivier was being driven up as I walked by," he said. "I was three feet from him. It was fun. He's marvelous, very relaxed."

SPINDLER, who wanted to be in the film for the experience, contracted a case of sore feet when he found that the pair of wing tipped shoes issued to him were in need of repair.

"It was raining and my feet were wet," he said. After four takes the scene was over. Spindler doubts if he can use the experience in his class, which concentrates on stage performance, instead of film.

"I'd definitely do it, again," he said.

Eugene Schoeneich though it would be fun to be an extra.

"At first I was nonchalant. But then after waiting in line I kept thinking, 'wouldn't it be great,'" he said.

After being turned down for a speaking part because he wasn't a member of the Actor's Guild, Schoeneich stumbled into the part of the guard who opens the door for Olivier when the original choice found that the uniform wouldn't fit.

"Sir Laurence says 'Good morning Tom, to me and I acknowledge,'" Schoeneich said of his minute in the spotlight.

Instead of seeing actors rushing around and hearing directors screaming directions, Schoeneich discovered that the crew was patient and understanding.

"This is very sedate and controlled. They'd have to be," he said.

The director took the time to explain to everyone what was happening in the scene and how it fit into the movie.

MOST OF THE EXTRAS from Farmington did their share of standing around and waiting for the scene to be filmed.

"There was a lot of standing around and waiting," according to Spindler.

Ken Gutowski, 19, found that out for himself when he was cast as a locked out worker in 1938. They cut his hair, much to his consternation, but he reasons, "this is a once in a lifetime opportunity."

"We sat around and did absolutely nothing for two to three hours," said Gutowski, a mechanical engineering major at University of Michigan.

He thought he'd see more persons working on the film inside a building. Instead, he sat on the curb in front of the Park Davis building in Detroit, which was re-christened the Bethlehem Motors Co. for the film.

After sitting on a curb dressed in the styles of an auto worker in the late Thirties, Gutowski decided what he'd do if he was asked again to be an extra.

"Yup, I'd do it again," he said.

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Looking tough, like a 1938 strike-breaker should, is Dunckel Junior High School teacher Greg Grodzicki. The suit he's wearing was worn by Edward G. Robinson in "Little Caesar." (Photo by Tom Krupka)



Pretending they're locked out factory workers, Ken Gutowski (left), of Farmington, Jim Randolph, of Farmington and Steve Bensil of Pontiac,

while away the time on the sidewalk in front of the Park-Davis building. (Photo by Tom Krupka)

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Waiting for the plant to open is a number of extras dressed in 1938 garb. On the right, in the modern striped shirt is Betsy director Dan Petrie. (Photo by Tom Krupka)



Striding out from the executive's entrance of the Bethlehem Motor Company are a group of swell-looking big shots. Look closer and the bow-tied executive, on the far left is Greg Grodzicki. Leading the pack is Farmington High School drama teacher Ves Spindler in the light suit and tie. (Photos by Tom Krupka)