

Farmington theater group keeps craft within family



Here's the WW I pilot in his Sopwith Camel checking with his copilot on weather conditions over Frances Maureen Baker, as Woodstock, acts as Snoopy's right hand bird. Gail Vasku is Snoopy, the intrepid dreamer. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Every weekday evening after supper Yvonne Dixon of Farmington hills, gathers up her two daughters and her first aid kit and takes them to a rehearsal of the Farmington Family Players.

Across town, Cookie Baker, of Birmingham, goes through a similar nightly ritual as she packs up her daughter and the group's props before making her way to rehearsal.

Both mothers agree the activity has helped them grow closer to their children.

And that's the way Sally Sawyer, organizer of the Family Players planned it.

"We've grown closer, together," said Mrs. Dixon, whose daughters, Maureen, 5, and Denise, 17, have roles in the group's production of "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown."

"We're closer because we're all involved in the same thing; we don't have one person going in one direction and the other going off in another direction," she said.

HER CO-WORKER IN THE GROUP, Mrs. Baker, stresses the group promotes family togetherness through its organization. Parents are encouraged to join the group at the same time the children become members.

"It's a family idea," Mrs. Baker said. "It really pursues the family element. The whole family gets involved. Everyone seems to get involved even if they don't actually join the group. It helps bring back the family unit."

"I've grown closer with Heidi. It's something fun that we can do together," she said.

Her daughter, Heidi, 8, is in the chorus of "Charlie Brown." "Her voice was too young for the play and mine was too strong," said Mrs. Baker, dressed in an above-the-knee dress with puffed sleeves for the play's chorus. She shook her pigtails for emphasis.

The 15 families belonging to the group strive for fun instead of creating a high-pressure situation, according to Mrs. Sawyer.

"It's not a professional production," Mrs. Baker agreed. "We want to do a good job but fun is part of it as well. We don't feel the pressure. If Heidi enjoys it, we're going to continue on."

ENTHUSIASM FOR THE group by its members was something of a surprise for Mrs. Sawyer, who started the Players as a means to complete work for her doctorate in drama three years ago.

"I had to write, direct and produce a play and conduct my own work-

shop," Mrs. Sawyer remembered. "When it was over, we had a picnic to celebrate and we realized that we had fun together."

In keeping with the concept of a family group, the presidents are a parent-child team.

Just because a person is young doesn't mean his ideas aren't good," she said.

It was Mrs. Sawyer's personality that helped to keep the group growing, according to members.

"Denise was interested in theater and I talked to Sally and suddenly we were members," Mrs. Dixon said.

Once families participate in the workshop, they're eligible to join the group.

Mrs. Sawyer sees to it that each member of the group receives plenty of encouragement.

"She made me feel I have a great deal of potential. She's enthusiastic," said Mrs. Baker of her coach.

ENCOURAGEMENT HAS HELPED younger members of the group, as well.

Last year, Maureen Dixon had to be coaxed to say her only line in "Cheaper by the Dozen."

"She was basically shy and this brought her out," explained Mrs. Dixon. "Last year, we gave her the line and she wouldn't say it. So we told her we were giving it to someone else. She didn't want to give it up but we had to do a sales job on her to say it."

"She brought down the house with that line. She asks the father if she can go with him. And, of course, in the play, the father is going to the hospital to die. There wasn't a dry eye in the house," she said.

This year, Maureen is playing Woodstock, Snoopy's best friend.

The play will be presented at 8:15 p.m. March 24-26 in Franklin Community Church.



It's the only way to get a good night's sleep, according to Snoopy. The relaxed pooch likes to take his naps on the roof of his dog house. Gail Vasku looks as if she's mastered the technique of dog house slumber.

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Heidi Baker, 8, of Birmingham, squeals with delight during rehearsal break with Gail Vasku, who plays Snoopy. Rehearsals mean hard work for the group but they are in the play for fun and togetherness.



Linus (Lynn Ingram, of Farmington, left), Schroeder (Howard Davis, of West Bloomfield), Richard Ktone, of Birmingham, company pianist and Peppermint Patty (Sue Turgeon, of Farmington Hills) join in honoring Charlie Brown. Luvy (Terry Sawyer, of West Bloomfield), Frieda (Denise Dixon, of Farmington Hills) and Snoopy (Gail Vasku, of Orchard Lake) join in the festivities. Woodstock (Maureen Dixon, of Farmington Hills), Mrs. Cookie Baker, of Birmingham and Heidi Baker, join in the chorus. Frank Hill of Farmington Hills plays Charlie Brown, who sports the dog dish crown in the center of the group.



Maureen Dixon, of Farmington Hills, shows off her loose tooth to Players' producer Sally Sawyer, of West Bloomfield. Maureen, 5, plays Snoopy's feathered sidekick, Woodstock. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

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