

The Farmington Players start small and end up big

By DONALD V. CALAMIA

The Farmington branch of the American Association of University Women never would have believed that its small, dramatic study group would one day grow into the Farmington Players, one of the longest running amateur theaters in the Detroit area.

The group was formed in 1951. Initially it performed shows in various schools and churches. Meetings were held in individual's homes. Then in 1955, the Farmington Players were able to lease an old dairy barn on 12 Mile Road.

"The barn came complete with stalls, hay lofts and a milking room," said long-time member Ellie Jorgensen.

"Of course, we began fixing it up right away so that it now bears little resemblance to a dairy barn."

Today, the playhouse contains a prop shop, costume room; basement rehearsal area, a meeting area and an auditorium which seats 178 people.

"THE EARLY SHOWS had pigeons to contend with," laughed Walter Jorgensen. "When the farmhouse was sold in 1965 the Players were given the option to buy the barn. Twelve members put up their own money to purchase the property."

Through the hard work of its dedicated members, the Players were able to transform the old barn into a modern facility.

"We're very pleased with the fact that we are entirely self-supporting," Mrs. Jorgensen said. "We receive no grants or gratuities. Nobody gets paid for anything. Everything we do is for the love of it, and we do it ourselves."

In addition to transforming the barn into the theater, the Players recently fireproofed the entire building and replaced the auditorium chairs with theater seating.

The group now has 125 members. Approximately 50 participate on a given show.

chairman, set dressing and parking are only a few of the positions filled by company members.

The job of costume designer has been filled by an original member, Hope Nahstoll. "Our costume shop is quite complete," said Mrs. Jorgensen. "We have everything that you can imagine from every period and in every size and color. Hope will take anything and everything from our costume shop. The Players also rents costumes to other theater groups."

"This group has an interesting array of people," member Ron Turek said. "We all have a common interest: the theater."

Among its members are lawyers, teachers, engineers and computer analysts. "All groups have camaraderie, and

added Jorgensen, "but it's a nice group of people to work with, a social group covering all ages from 19 to 70."

The Jorgensens have been involved with the Players for about 11 years. "Walt became involved with the Players even though he had no aspirations to be on stage," Mrs. Jorgensen said. "He'll stage manage, build sets and sell tickets. There's always something to do."

COMPANY MEMBERS come from Royal Oak, Birmingham and Detroit, though the majority are from Farmington and Bloomfield.

The group puts on three major productions each season and a summer show. "We try to do a balance each year — a comedy, a serious drama and a musical," Mrs. Jorgensen said. "We try to keep our audiences and our ac-

tors happy."

The Players draws its audience from all over the Detroit area. "About 30 percent of our audience comes from south of Eight Mile Road," said Jorgensen, the ticket chairman. "And a third come from the Farmington-Bloomfield area. We get the rest from places like Southfield, the West Lake area, Milford and Brighton."

"The gasoline shortage has had no effect on our attendance," he continued, "and nobody seems to be worried about it, especially our members. Some of them drive in a long way two or three times a week for rehearsals. We sell out almost every performance."

Performances are held at 32332 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington, between Farmington and Orchard Lake Roads. For more information call the Players at 477-1066.

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