

# Elegant costumes her forte despite deadlines

By CAROL MAHONEY

Sometimes what takes place behind the scenes is as intriguing as what happens on stage. Ask Mary Lynn Bonnell, head costume designer at Meadow Brook Theater.

Speaking at the first of a series of coffee hours sponsored by the West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Department, Mrs. Bonnell regaled her audience with stories of frantic, last minute costume remakes.

She recalled a time last fall when coats rented for actors portraying British soldiers in "The Devil's Disciple" turned out to look like grade school band uniforms. Using upholstery braid and fringe for trim, Mrs. Bonnell constructed new redcoats for the three major characters in less than two days.

For this reason Mrs. Bonnell said she is reluctant to rent any costume by mail unless she sees a sample beforehand.

She added that practically all of the costumes used in Meadow Brook Theater productions are made by herself and a part-time staff of four.

"It's not very glamorous," said Mrs. Bonnell of her theater basement workshop. "We work in blue jeans, cutting, sewing and dying fabrics."

SINCE ALL THE COSTUMES must be made in the three weeks prior to the play's opening, Mrs. Bonnell and her staff works on an irregular schedule.

"We don't work eight hour days. There are times we might have to work 18 hours," she said, describing the almost-around-the-clock dedication needed as opening night approaches.

To the delight of her audience, Mrs. Bonnell brought costumes from past productions with her. One ornate velvet gown from "She Sings to Conquer" was passed around the room.

"It's as heavy as a drape," exclaimed one woman in the audience.

Mrs. Bonnell said she and her staff even make elaborate underwear and corsets for wear under such gowns.

"Actresses really love to wear these things," she said. "Running around backstage in jeans and tennis shoes they don't really get the feel of being a grand lady. I've seen performances change drastically overnight just by putting the actors in costume."

Although she and her staff spend many hours crocheting trim or sewing beading by hand, Mrs. Bonnell thinks the time involved is worth it.

"We do many things that we could probably cheat on, but the extra work makes a big difference in the total picture," she said.

She explained how an ordinary hat steamed and curled over a tea kettle transformed almost magically into a cavalier's hat with the addition of a band and a bright colored feather.

Many of the costumes she displayed were beautiful ruffled creations. But, she reminded her listeners, not all of her work is with ribbons and lace.

To prove her point, she took one gloomy, furry piece from the wardrobe rack. It was Caliban's costume from "The Tempest." Unappealing as it was, the half monster, half fish creation demanded ingenuity on the part of its designer.

Mrs. Bonnell cited costume work on "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" as labor without much reward. When the naval uniforms were rented, none of them fit properly. According to Mrs. Bonnell, each one had to be taken apart and refitted.

"We could have gotten away with ill-fitting uniforms for the actors who sat behind the bench during the trial," she said with pride. "To fit them, and I'm glad we did."

DESPITE THE WORK which goes into each and every costume, Mrs. Bonnell said, "We don't very often use them over again unless it's for a minor character."

Meadow Brook has a predominantly subscription audience which makes it too likely that a costume used over will be recognized, she said.

"One of my biggest problems is finding fabric," Mrs. Bonnell said.

Because of the problem, she convinced the theatre management

to send her on a buying trip to New York in the fall. She believes the expense was warranted because she was able to buy all the fabric for the elegantly costumed "Ring Around the Moon" in one day.

Although the actors are measured for costumes well in advance, Mrs. Bonnell said they don't actually try them on or wear them on the set until the afternoon of the day before the preview performance.

Then the actors do a special run through for the lighting technicians and costume people so that any unforeseen problems can be ironed out before the dress rehearsal Tuesday night.

"We try to grab as many costumes as they are having trouble with and adjust them during the dinner break," Mrs. Bonnell said.

Once the play opens, Mrs. Bonnell said her contribution to that play is over. "While one show is running, I'm busy working on the next one," she said.

Granted that Mrs. Bonnell can meet any costume challenge, she said she likes to think of herself as a Las Vegas costumer.

"I'd like to put everybody in spangles," she said.

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Jellison-Muessen

Mr. and Mrs. James E. Jellison, of Farmington Hills, announce the engagement of their daughter Linda Sue to Henry John Muessen III, son of Mr. and Mrs. Henry John Muessen, Jr., of Chatham Township, N.J.

The bride to be is a graduate of North Farmington High School and University of Michigan. She is now attending U-M's graduate school with work in library science. She is an alumni of Chi Omega Sorority and employed as a resident assistant in the university's West Quad.

Her fiancé is a graduate of Chatham Township High School and a student at University of Michigan. The aerospace engineer will soon be commissioned a U.S. Navy officer.

A December wedding is planned.

## Political analyst speaks to League

Tom Greene, political analyst with WJBK-TV 2, will be the featured speaker at the West Bloomfield-Farmington Area League of Women Voters' annual meeting and luncheon.

The meeting will begin at 11:30 a.m. Saturday at the Roman Terrace restaurant, Farmington Hills.

Reservations can be arranged by

calling 626-8949. The public is welcome to attend.

Discussing the Lansing beat, Greene will bring insights on legislative matters to this traditional event when the league elects its officers and directors for the coming year.

Highlighted also will be the 1979-80 proposed local program and budget.

## BPW calls guests to April meeting

The Farmington Chapter of Business and Professional Women invite working women in the area to its dinner meeting at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 3, in Boleford Inn.

"There is no need for reservations," said Mary Samples, spokesperson for the group. "We have arrangements with the inn for a private dining room, and we all order from the menu."

"We are asking working women in the area to join us for the purpose of getting them acquainted with what Business and Professional Women's organization means."

The club's objectives is to elevate the standards for women in business and in the professions, and to promote the interests of these women.

The national federation of the clubs aims to bring about a spirit of coopera-

tion among business and professional women in the U.S.

It extends opportunities to these women through education along the lines of industrial, scientific and vocational activities.

Membership is open to any woman who is employed, full or part time. Age or residency is not a requirement, though most of the current members in the group either live or work in Farmington or Farmington Hills.

The dinner meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month, at the local inn, and always followed by a speaker whose talk is geared to appeal to the woman who works.

The speaker for April is a representative from Snelling and Snelling Employment Agency who will talk on career planning.

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