

# Actor blends both worlds

By KATHY PARRISH

There's usually a double-take or two in the audience when Jerry Dahlmann strolls on stage.

For the Avon Township actor's main role — one he's played 16 years — is university administrator.

"I have the best of all possible worlds," said Dahlmann, whose recent appearance in the television movie "Word of Honor" surprised many of his Oakland University co-workers. "Everyone in the theater is unemployed, but I never hustle jobs. Acting is an avocation for me, I love it."

While most actors fret over the next job, Dahlmann rarely contacts the Livonia and Southfield agencies which line up character parts for him.

As assistant director of OUP's Center for General and Career Studies, his daytime radio and television work is done on behalf of university media relations. He's presently exploring cable TV possibilities for the school.

One night a week, the former director of Oakland's now-closed Academy of Dramatic Art trains young actors. So Dahlmann's own acting has to be done at night and on weekends. Somehow he's managed to sandwich in 50 commercials, 100 training films, 17 Meadow Brook Theatre plays and four feature films.

"I PLAY small roles because I don't have time to do more," said the actor, whose stint in Meadow Brook's upcoming "Arsenic and Old Lace" will tie him up for a month.

"It's kind of hectic and sometimes I wonder if I should be doing this. But otherwise I'd be sitting around wondering why I'm not doing it."

A lifelong Avon resident, 44-year-old Dahlmann has been acting since he was a Rochester High School student. As senior class president he arranged his first professional show — an unhappy experience.

"Sunny Sales was big, so I decided to get him as the main attraction for our Senior Carnival," said Dahlmann with a grin. "We paid him \$50, he stayed only 10 minutes and I spent the rest of the day explaining to people what happened."

At Central Michigan University, majoring in English and drama, Dahlmann worked both on stage and behind the scenes.

He taught at Utica and Rochester high schools before taking a series of unattractive jobs which led him into creative writing.

He was writing and producing the Ford Truck account for Wilding Motion Pictures when he was recruited by Oakland University to recruit new students.

"I WAS NAIVE enough to believe academic life is not full of the politics advertising life is," he said.

Growth and financial cutbacks have taken him from admissions to placement and alumni relations, as well as to a job lining up field experience for new college students. From 1968-77 he was administrative director of the Academy of Dramatic Arts, a two-year diploma program eliminated in budget cuts.

He then put together a radio show called "Outlook" which explored campus programs. Spring 1980 budget cuts took him to the Center for General and Career Studies.

"That's what happens when you're in the soft world and not the hard dollar world," he said. "They eliminate positions to save money, but something always turns up."

While his university career wasn't planned, neither was his acting. He'd been active with Avon Players for years when he took the Academy of Dramatic Art directorship.

WHEN DAHLMANN got a request from Michigan State University for actors for a training film, he and a student won the roles. The stint led to a seven-film series for the National Institute of Mental Health.

"It's fate. I probably wouldn't have done any of this if it hadn't been for that phone call."

Since that stint as a doctor, he's played salesmen, customers and truck drivers. He started acting with Meadow

Brook Theatre in 1970. His credits include not only local and national commercials, but work in the films "Blue Collar" and "Detroit 9000."

In "Word of Honor" he played Grady Hill, the father of the teen-ager whose murder is the subject around which the film is built.

Although he tried to get acting work in Hollywood during a three-month 1976 university leave, Dahlmann isn't interested in an acting career.

"I don't know if I have the nerves to do it fulltime." The competition is just "too tough," he said.

Dahlmann said he works more than 90 percent of the actors in California, however, and has considered devoting more time to his hobby when he retires from the university. "I lost my hair at 23, so I've played older parts a long time."

"I think I could work in the theater until I'm 90 like Walter Pidgeon. The nice thing about theater is you're never too old to work."

Although he sometimes regrets that his life is so hectic, Dahlmann feels the friendships he's made in the theater are worth it all.

"I think people who are really good actors are good studies of human nature. They have an attitude about life I like," he said.

"It's like being on a bomb squad. They're living on borrowed time and keep their sense of humor. And they're doing what they want to do."

"I admire them. And they probably admire me because I do it against the odds."



In "Word of Honor," Jerry Dahlmann portrayed Grady Hill, father of murdered Cindy Hill. His wife was played by Jane Burton of Birmingham.

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