

# Pair rob restaurant employee

A Farmington Hills Pizza Hut employee was robbed at gunpoint of about \$1,700 by an unidentified man and woman early Sunday morning at the 10 Mile Road branch of Michigan National Bank's night deposit box.

As employee Norma Vickery was approaching the deposit box about 3 a.m. to make a deposit for the Pizza Hut at 10 Mile and Grand River, a woman, described as in her late teens, approached Vickery holding a long-barreled gun, said Farmington Hills

police.

According to police, the armed robber told Vickery, "Drop it (the money bag) containing the \$1,700. I've got a gun." Although the male suspect, also described as being in his late teens was nearby, he did not speak to Vickery, she told police.

After the suspects picked up the money bag, Vickery was ordered to drop to the ground. They ran west across the bank and Pizza Hut's parking lots where other wit-

nesses said another suspect was waiting inside a parked car.

The suspects were last seen traveling westbound on Grand River.

The female suspect is described as five feet, five inches tall, of slim build, with brown, straight, shoulder-length hair. The male is described as five feet seven inches, slim, with brown hair cut in a punk style. He also wore a pierced earring in his left ear.

# Secretary takes on 'gutsy' role

By Carol Axilzen  
staff writer

Twenty years ago, Lila Walter was stage-struck as she watched Ethel Merman's stunning performance in "Gypsy."

Now — after paying her dues singing in benefits for charity groups, on radio shows and at piano bars — the 43-year-old Southfield resident is playing the role that she once dreamed of performing.

Walter stars as Rose, the tempestuous stage mother of Gypsy Rose Lee — the legendary first lady of burlesque — in the Pontiac Theatre IV production of "Gypsy." The last two performances will be staged at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday in the Grand Ballroom of Masonic Temple, 1 Lafayette St., Pontiac.

"When Ethel Merman played Rose, I knew I wanted that part," recalled the demure actress. "It was a dream I had."

"Ethel Merman was unbelievable. The part was made for her. There's never been anybody else who has played it as well."

Although she's not attempting to rival Merman's performance, Walter has put her heart and soul into the role.

"People would ask me how I could work all day (she's a legal secretary) and then rehearse every night for six weeks."

"I looked forward to going to rehearsals. It was an uplifting experience."

The part is "very demanding," especially for a woman who has never played a major role, Walter said.

"There are 17 scenes in the show and I'm in all but three. There's a lot of costume changes and the songs are very demanding."

A basically shy person off stage, Walter

— with the encouragement of director Marge Monrois of Rochester — quickly learned how to become aggressive and loud.

"IT'S A VERY GUTSY role," she said. "Rose yells and screams a lot. She's very bossy — everything I'm not."

"But I guess it's good to get out of yourself and become another person sometimes," she said.

The mother of two identifies with the play because as a child, she, too, was pushed into performing.

"My mother wasn't an aggressive, pushy stage mother, but she still encouraged me to sing in kiddie shows and at lodge halls. I've been performing since I was 2 years old."

Walter was married soon after graduating from high school, raised her two children — Lisa, 19, and Kenny, 17, and then worked as a part-time bookkeeper, for an insurance company and now as a legal secretary.

While holding down full-time jobs, Walter sang in benefit shows for charitable groups, including City of Hope, the American Cancer Society and Women's American ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation and Training).

She performed with pianist Ronnie Phillips at local restaurants and bars, including the Kingsley Inn, Bloomfield Hills, and the now defunct Scotch and Sirolo, Detroit.

A FEW YEARS AGO, Walter won a contest to sing on WXYZ radio. For two months, she sang in five-minute spots on a broadcast geared toward teaching listeners how to sing.

Last year, she sang the national anthem at a couple of Detroit Pistons games.

Venturing into theater was a new experience for Walter. "I never thought I could be an actress," she said. "I always thought of myself as a singer."



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