

Suburban Life

Loraine McClellan editor/477-5450



Thursday, February 10, 1984 O&E

(F)1B



Meeting each other face to face, the audience at Long Meadow Elementary School discovers there isn't any stage to separate it from members of the OCC Chamber Theater.



Sharing a tender moment, the Tender family members discover they've managed to save from the flood what they love the most, each other. Learning that people are more valuable than objects are chamber theater members (clockwise

from lower left) Greg Velzy of Waterford, the Tender son; Ethel Parks of Bloomfield Township, the Tender mother; Tony Lord of Southfield, the Tender father and Denise Cohen of W. Bloomfield, the Tender daughter.

Some plays rated 'G' for Girambafoobler

NO foolin'. It was a Girambafoobler. Big as life on the gym floor at Long Meadow Elementary School in Avon Township. It played baseball (sort of). It danced (a little). It made children and teachers chuckle (a lot).

When the hunters freed the gentle Girambafoobler, a sigh of

relief rippled through the gym. Casting off the anger that transformed it into another creature, it girambafoobled its way home.

That frisky little beast was brought to life in the imaginations of its audience last week by the Chamber Theatre of Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills. The brainchild of instructor Wallace Smith, the 8-year-old theater group performs fanciful vignettes that eschew sexism, violence and racism.

"I believe very strongly in that," Smith said. Using material that reflects the beliefs of the group's founder, the ensemble's style remains subtle, not strident. "We don't push that. We don't preach it. We don't punch it."

ALTHOUGH THE group will discuss the plays' lessons if the audience is interested, it's not a mandatory part of any performance, Smith said. "It's not driven into the audience. It's inherent in the pieces."

The OCC group has performed in front of everyone from preschoolers to seniors in places ranging from schools to hospital hallways to streets. After the president of the University of North Dakota saw a story on Smith and his group in the Christian Science Monitor, the OCC instructor was asked to participate last April in a conference for peace conducted by the university and the city of Grand Forks, N.D.

He and his actors toured through as many of the city's schools as they could including two "bummious" schools on a nearby Air Force base.

Usually not so far flung, touring has been an integral part of the OCC Chamber Theater since its inception. Originally, the college lacked facilities for such performances, so Smith decided that the actors would travel to their audiences. Armed with a few plots, he persuaded writer friends to turn them into short stories which Smith in turn transformed into plays.

THROUGH THE years students and a writer Arlene Victor Biggs have contributed enough plays so Smith can rely on a bank of about 25 stories to find seven which fit the needs and talents of his cast. The company has about 14 actors but shows can be put on by as few as seven or eight people.

"I wanted to tour and do original material that had something to say other than doing kiddie shows," Smith said.

"We all know how much violence there is in reality. There's violence in the media and in children's programming. Why not offer an alternative to that? We stress positiveness and love — not fear, vengeance, violence or pain," he said.

"In the pieces we have, there's conflict. But the resolution comes through positive action, not violence," he said.



Wallace Smith narrates the stories while the actors relate the action mostly in mime.



Shivering in the winter's cold, the mice community, played by members of the audience, look to Frederick, the mouse artist for some relief. Teachers, include Long Meadow principal Anita Page were selected by the actors to participate in this segment. The artist everyone criticized as lazy managed to ease winter's chill by evoking images of sunshine and flowers in the minds of his fellow mice, thus emerging as the hero of the tale.



Pulling together to harvest the giant radish, the old man, his wife, son, dog and cat learn that even a tiny mouse has something to contribute. It's with the mouse's help the group is able to yank the giant radish from the garden and share a handsome meal.

Staff photos by David Frank