

Weekends tell whodunit

By Carmina Brooks
special writer

MICKEY HEALD of Farmington produces horrible entertainment, and in four months without advertising, his new business is booming.

Last fall, Heald was teaching in Akron, Ohio, when a friend asked him to manage a Murder Mystery Weekend in the Aurora Sheraton Hotel.

"I had never heard of mystery weekends," he said. "It originated in England and came to the USA about seven years ago. Now it is big business."

The murder mystery game is a new, often unpredictable, form of entertainment. Players are participants in the plot. Improvisation is rampant and anything can happen.

Heald and assistant Ed Postil of Plymouth are so taken with this new form of entertainment they conduct a full-time business of writing, producing and managing mystery parties for hotels, corporations and private gatherings that can last three hours or three days. Guests may total 20 or 200.

HEALD IS A FORMER Ohio high school teacher of English literature and theatrical arts and a graduate of Kent State University.

He heads an acting crew of 20, including a woman who teaches gifted children, theatrical arts students who work for expenses, hired professionals and contributing writers.

"This is typical of theater. We have production aspects, but we play party host plus handle business arrangements for guests and actors. We act as an extension of the hotel," Heald explained.

Beginning price for a one-night party is \$800. A weekend package costs hotels between \$2,000 and \$4,000.

"We create a scenario and plot around a special event — a wedding, a class reunion, a vacation weekend. People come dressed for a wedding and end up with a wake," he said.

SOME STORYLINES revolve around drug smuggling, a child's bid for attention, a kidnapping or a nightclub St. Valentine's Day massacre. And one or a dozen people die. One problem is how not to ruin the furniture with gore, Heald said.

Actors mix with guests and guests don't know who is lying. After a murder, interrogations are conducted, clues are left to cloud suspicions and sometimes arrests are made.

"We don't do anything dangerous. Only the actors come into conflict. Everything is carefully planned," said Heald.

Things do not always go according

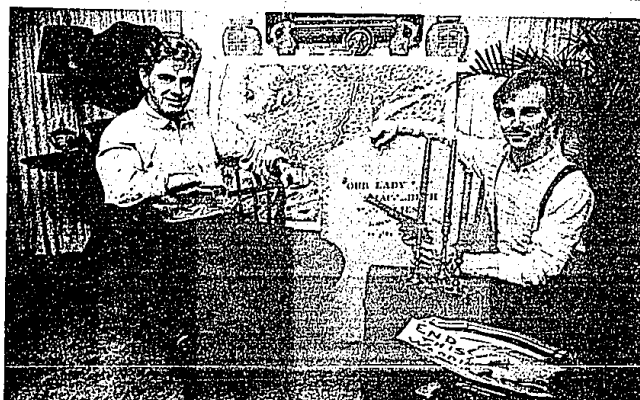
to script, however. During one of Heald's weekends an elderly woman faked a heart attack. Hotel clerks asked, "Didn't you just have another death? Shouldn't we call the ambulance?" When Heald answered no he was told, "There's a lady on the floor. We didn't think it was for real."

A policeman-actor was sent to her. He stooped and whispered, "An ambulance is coming to administer an oxygen, give you a real intravenous and a real medical bill." She liked an eyeful and announced, "I am playing the Game!"

"WE FIND superleuths who get off the couch and attack the characters. Others just sit and laugh. It's an energetic and draining experience," Heald said.

Heald was booked at a birthday party Saturday, for a Birmingham man, starting in Detroit and moving to the Holly Hotel. This horribly entertaining night of mystery was planned by his wife.

Mickey Heald may be reached at Mystery for Hire, phone 474-4649.



Staff photo

Farmington resident Michel Heald (right) and assistant Ed Postil, who lives in Plymouth, show some of the tools of their trade as organizers of mystery weekends. Curious maps,

tombstones, pistols, candles, notes written in blood, and severed hands are among the ghoulish props that may give clues to party guests, who track down an elusive killer.

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