

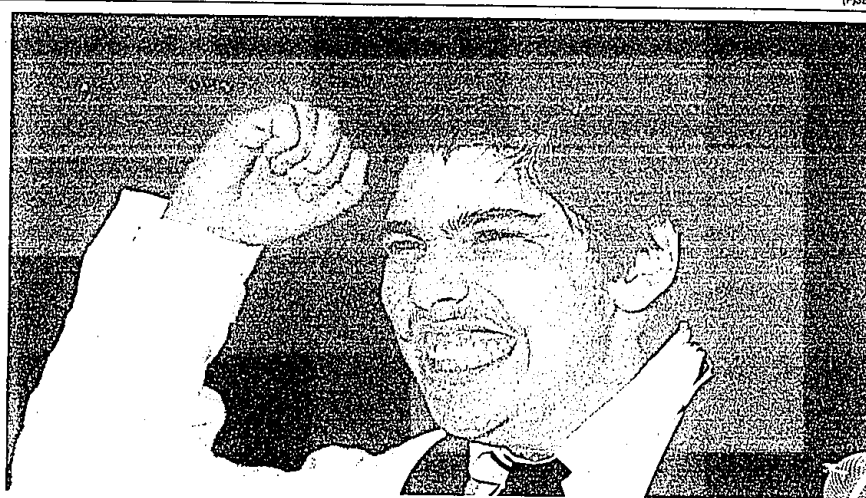
Suburban Life

Loraine McClellan editor/477-5450



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(F3B)



Todd Dovitt (at left) took the role of the hero and Ray Montoya (above) played the part of the villain in the old-fashioned melodrama staged by students in Farmington Training Center for their end-of-the-year production.

How the Race Was Won

The play is not the thing for these students
— it is a classroom learning experience

By Loraine McClellan
Staff writer

FRAN AARON, director, producer and narrator for Farmington Training Center

ter's student shows stepped back to be announcer, only, for the spring production of "How the Race Was Won."

"It was the first time the students spoke all of their own lines," Aaron said. "It was thrilling and exciting experience for all of us."

The end-of-the-season play, a melodrama, and the accomplishment she achieved was the last hurrah at the center for Aaron who retires this month after a 10-year career.

Aaron made theater a tradition in the center and then turned the performances into a dinner theater with parents and staff contributing to a pot luck.

"I don't know why I did it. I just always did it, wherever I was. I love theater, and I just sort of fell into it here," she said.

Preparation for the finished 30-minute productions that take from January until mid-June, includes at least a dozen songs, and so many students as Aaron can squeeze onto the stage.

"The play itself is certainly not the main thrust. The entire process is a learning experience, a great learning experience," she said.

A FIRST-TIME Farmington Training Center play-goer cannot help but be aware of the unusual amount of applause and cheering the cast gets from its audience of fellow students.

"That's part of it, of course. We all like applause and it is good for our self-esteem. But that is not unusual here. These students are kind to one another. There is just not the pettiness, the jealousy that you'll find in other schools. When one student does well on stage, in class, in sports, on the playground, wherever, they identify with one another and every one of them will take pride in every accomplishment one kid makes," Aaron said.

"There is a lot of hugging in this school."

Aaron thinks of the end-of-school play as a device to help the students get along with others, both in and out of school.

"They come to us with many problems and through theater some are resolved and many are at least minimized. That is the big thrust. They learn how to follow directions and learn how to be good listeners, something we could all use a few lessons on," she said.

Aaron told of one student who talked incessantly, another who hardly talked at all, another who was not very cooperative at the beginning of the school term, who all

"learned to take responsibility, learned to speak on cue without help, learned to cooperate with one another, work together, work as a group. That is the big lesson," she said.

AARON IS A resident of Oak Park who started her career as a teacher to the deaf. She continued in that capacity until her deaf students were mainstreamed into the public school classes.

At Farmington Training Center Aaron chooses the play she will produce with care, always with a moral and always with zesty songs.

The good guys outwitted the bad guys in "How the Race Was Won" while the cast sang out with gusto songs such as "Camptown Races" and "No, No, a Thousand Times No."

As for her retirement, Aaron says she strongly suspects she will get involved with Theatre for the Deaf.



Lisa Grodan held the cards that announced the beginning of each scene in proper melodramatic style.



Anna Romanow takes a bow. Cast as the heroine in "How the Race Was Won," follow actors are Pat Mobray, Joe Feathers and Lena Seagram on her left, and Doug Vollinger on her right.

Directing

A broken hand doesn't deter Dean Cobb from pointing, gesturing and calling out directions to the 50 member cast of "South Pacific" that is made up of members of Farmington Community Band, Farmington Musical and Farmington Community Chorus. Cobb, who is telecommunication coordinator for Farmington Public Schools, doubles as drama director for the Rogers and Hammerstein musical staged Thursday through Sunday in Harrison High School auditorium. All seats are reserved. Tickets are \$4, or \$2 for seniors and students, available by calling Fern Barber, 661-4604, or Mary Orwig, 477-3596.



RICK SMITH/staff photographer

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