

New film traces cultural threads of Hmong

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

Things get lost. Sometimes, it's trivial items like keys and wallets and sunglasses; sometimes, it's important things. Sometimes, people get lost.

Detroit-area filmmaker Kathryn Vander doesn't want to see that happen. She is determined to see that the Hmong people are not lost. "Threads of Survival," a 25-minute film about the Hmong and their way of life as told through the culture's weaving and stitching, will premiere 3 p.m. Sunday, April 7, at the Detroit Artists Market, 1452 Randolph, Harmonie Park in Detroit.

"Threads of Survival" tells the story of a displaced people. When the film is released, I hope people will gain an appreciation not only for Hmong art, but for who the Hmong are," Vander said.

Originally from northern China, by the 16th century the Hmong people migrated to the mountain regions of Laos, where they established a mainly agrarian society separate from other cultures.

There, they remained until the early 1950s, when they were caught in the middle of the Vietnam War. Some chose to side with the Communist north, but a vast majority of the Hmong worked with the Central Intelligence Agency and sided with American-backed forces trying to bolster the South Vietnamese government.

At the close of the conflict, when U.S. forces left, the Hmong found themselves on the losing side. Fearing persecution, and very likely death, they fled to Thailand, where they lived in refugee camps before they were able to emigrate

MANY ESCAPED to Thailand, where they lived in refugee camps before they were able to emigrate

to other parts of the world. Today, southeast Michigan is one of a handful of areas with a large population of Hmong people, along with California, Rhode Island and Minnesota. "The potential is there for (the culture) to die away," Vander said.

Vander, a Farmington Hills resident, said she has wanted to make a film since her days as a University of Michigan film student. But it wasn't until three years ago she determined she would make a film about the Hmong craft and culture.

Vander conceived the idea for the film after reading an article about a local woman receiving the National Endowment of Arts National Heritage Award.

That woman, Nhu Yang Yang, a master weaver, became a central character in "Threads of Survival."

She, along with her daughter-in-law and apprentice, Ja Mona Yang, and story cloth seamstress, Yung Yang, are archetypes for the cultural progression of the Hmong people, Vander said.

THE VENERABLE stitching and weaving styles of the Hmong, who have no written language, serve as a recorded history of the people. "The Hmong woman, through their art, are becoming the culture's historians," Vander said.

Preserving the Hmong culture is why the film is being made, Vander said. "They realize they may not be around forever."

"Threads of Survival" was a labor of love for Vander and the film crew. John Prusak, director of cinematography for "Threads of Silence," and among other films, "Roger & Me," said he got involved when Vander, a participant in a workshop he was presenting on filmmaking, approached him about the project.

"I'm glad she did. It was a great

idea," he said. "When you see a story that needs to be told and isn't being told, it's a real opportunity. These people have no way of telling their story themselves," he continued. "There would be as they know it has deteriorated. The Hmong are almost a lost people."

Hmong art is a utilitarian art. It pervaded the Hmong culture's. Hanging tapestries or story cloths that once adorned the walls of a Hmong dwelling told the story of the people, of the clan, or of the family, Michigan State University art historian Marsha MacDowell said.

MacDOWELL, WHO served as consultant for "Threads of Survival," said the film is important for several reasons.

First, the film documents the migration from rural southeast Asia to urban centers and what that means to their culture. "Any person who moves from one place to another brings with them the traditions of the past."

Any culture transplanted from a rural land to an urban cityscape is going to encounter challenges and problems that threaten its existence. At the very least, the culture will change.

As that culture changes, the individuals sense of identity and affiliation with a group changes as well. "Threads of Silence" is about coping with that change and preserving the Hmong culture.

Vander said everything about the Hmong culture has been challenged by their forced migration. The Hmong's agricultural way of life, their language, their diet — everything has been effected in some way by the force migration that brought them to the United States.

"Even their clothing was steeped in the cultural," she continued. "It



Producer/director Kathryn Vander (right), director of cinematography John Prusak (middle) and assist director of cinematography Vic Spicer (left) prepare a shot for the new film "Threads of Survival," about Hmong culture and art.

is part of everyday life."

A YOUNG Hmong girl might spend an entire year on a garment for the New Year celebration. "All women in the Hmong culture would learn to sew (in that culture), if you're good at it, you're considered a good woman."

During the New Year celebration, clothing was used to attract a prospective husband — a well-made, handsome garment was con-

sidered to be a sign of a good family.

The importance of weaving and stitching in the Hmong culture also extended to the Hmong spiritual beliefs. The Hmong people consider it a necessity to weave and stitch a replete funeral outfit, which they believe must be worn so that their ancestors would recognize them, Vander said.

The funeral outfit was also considered important because the pre-

cession of the outfit determined one's station in life after reincarnation.

"Here in this country, people don't make their clothes because they have some special significance," Vander said. "Here, people go to Kmart to buy their clothes."

"These people don't do things that way. The Hmong are trying to build a life in a place that is totally alien to them."

Meadow Brook memories sought

It's not too late to put pen to pad, or tap the typewriter or PC, and share your Meadow Brook memories.

It's that time of year when we ask our readers to recount their fondest memories of the Meadow Brook Music Festival, which brightens the cozy grounds of Oakland University in Rochester Hills each summer.

Gabaret to benefit symphony

Continued from Page 1

Doors open 7 p.m. Seating will be at tables of eight and 10.

For the "Suddenly It's Spring" cabaret, tables of eight are \$98; tables of 10 are \$120. Individual tickets are \$12.

Liszt's music set to poetry

Musica Viva! Concerts Buick International presents "Mephisto Drama Franz Liszt" in its first American tour Friday, April 12.

Show time is 8 p.m. at the Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge Campus Smith Theatre, Orchard Lake Road at I-696, Farmington Hills.

The music of Franz Liszt, a virtuoso pianist and 19th century composer, will be set to the original poetry, sonnets and melodramas from Faust, Goethe and Petrarcha.

The production concept explores the confrontation of Faust/Mephistopheles and sacred/profane love. The melodramas (involving narrator and pianist) evoke Liszt's images of poetry, metaphysics and literary allusions with special lighting effects.

This program is created by French actor Philippe Nesme, who stars in the role of Mephistopheles, and Brazilian pianist Luis De Moura Castro, who stars in the role of Faust. Some of Liszt's

most challenging works are included: "The Funerals" and the "Mephisto Waltz No. 1."

"Mephisto Drama Franz Liszt" is "extraordinarily connected, unforgettable musically and visually," said Fernando Lalres, president of the American Liszt Society. "I wish everyone could see it."

An afterglow will be held in the lobby of the Smith Theatre. Tickets are \$15 for general admission and \$10 for all students and seniors.

For information or to make reservations, call the 24-hour hotline, 471-7700.

Tickets are available at the door or by sending a check made payable to the Livonia Symphony Society; Ida Krande, 28572 W. 12 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, 48031.

For more information call Krande, 851-4524, or Madonna, 591-5044.

— Bob Sklar
Assistant managing editor

editing. Because of limited space, please keep your memories to 300 words or less.

Writers whose special moments are published will be our guest at the concert of their choice this summer. In submitting your memories, include your name, address and daytime phone number. It's fine to include a favorite photo. Just make sure it will reproduce. We'll gladly return it.

Send your warmest reflections of life in the pavilion or stretching out on the grassy hillside to:

Meadow Brook Memories, c/o Special Sections Editor, Editorial Department, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

— Bob Sklar
Assistant managing editor

clarification

The Livonia Historical Society may host an interior design showcase as a fund-raiser at the 141-year-old Alexander Blue House, being restored at Greenmead Historical Village.

Although the showcase would be similar to what the Junior League of Detroit does, the league would not host it.

Furniture stores would adopt a room and furnish it. The public then would be invited to tour the dressed-up house for a small donation.

Phased restoration plans call for the Italianate-style, 11-room house to be used as a reception hall for nearby Newburg Church at Greenmead. Period furnishings would reflect 1880s Livonia Township. Restoration is projected to cost \$250,000.

incredible.... New, wonderful... Adult condominium community... Lakeshore living!

- Brand new condominiums — one and two bedrooms, choice of first or second floor — with all the latest luxury appointments.
- Covered parking, elevators.
- Five community rooms for cards, exercise, TV, lounging.
- Gracious living for those 50 and older. Spacious living, indoors and out. Safe and secure.
- 300 feet of private, sandy beachfront on Walled Lake in Novi.

SPECIALY PRICED! GRAND OPENING! \$69,900!

Furnished models Open Wed-Sun 15 PM

South Pointe
ADULT CONDOMINIUMS

1127 South Lake Drive
K&S ENTERPRISES Sales by Custom Realty Services

624-4670
CALL ANY TIME

CHARLESTOWNE COURT



Elegant Condominiums For "A Downtown Lifestyle"

"NEW SPRING PRICES" \$98,900 - \$108,900

Enter Our Courtyard and Take a Step Back in Time. Experience the Gracious Living of Yesterday — Live in the Heart of Farmington with all the Conveniences a Short Walk Away.

STANDARD FEATURES INCLUDE:

- Bay Windows
- In-house Alarm
- Storage Room for Each Unit
- Lower Level Activity Room with Kitchen
- Convenient, Quiet Location
- Marital Cabaret
- Less Maintenance
- In-unit Laundry
- Most Units for All Windows
- Covered Parking

Located in Downtown Farmington on Orchard Street (East of Farmington Rd. - One Block South of Grand River)

SALES BY:

NETWORK

3500 Grand River Farmington 476-1600 Ask for Janet or Jane

MODEL HOURS: 10:00-5:00 Daily & Weekends (Closed Thursdays)

MODEL PHONE: 477-5578

ARCHITECT: John A. Allen DEVELOPED BY: The Richard Group

FOREST HILLS
of Brighton
condominiums
Developed by Forest Hills Associates

OUR LUXURY HOMES FEATURE:

- Approx 1155 sq. ft. spacious contemporary floor plans
- Balcony
- Air Conditioning
- Gas Heat
- Carpeting
- Low Maintenance
- In Brighton City Limits
- Walkout Basement
- Professional Landscaping
- Lakeview Settings
- Wooded Hillside
- Pond
- Natural Beauty
- Excellent access to US-24 & I-96
- All City Utilities
- Brighton Schools
- Attached Garages
- No Outside Maintenance

Ranches and Townhouses Starting at \$79,900

1300 West to Spencer Rd (exit 142), turn Right on Spencer which curves and turn Left on Church (exit 140) turn Right on Westlawn to Forest Hill

ASK FOR DAN LEABU III (313) 227-7030 After 5:00 (313) 227-9223

(313) 227-4000 2600 Grand River Brighton

MODEL OPEN SAT. & SUN 1-5 EVES. & WEEKDAYS BY APPT.

Mitch Harris
Building Company Inc.

Chamberlain REALTORS
Strong the area's finest communities since 1918

WEST BLOOMFIELD - Family neighborhood. Perfect location for small children being located on a cul-de-sac. 4 bedrooms and family room. \$159,777 (L-797) 647-6400
MARKETED BY DOUG & KATHIE

WEST BLOOMFIELD - Super sharp Colonial, built in 1989 has 4 bedrooms, family room with fireplace, neutral decor and move-in condition. \$173,777 (H-111) 647-6400
MARKETED BY DOUG & KATHIE

WEST BLOOMFIELD - Very attractive Contemporary with circular drive on lovely private lot. Walnut Lake privileges. Birmingham schools. \$155,000 (L-712) 647-6400
MARKETED BY ANNE HERSHEY

WEST BLOOMFIELD - Neutral 3 bedroom Condo with much privacy. Skylight over loft, white formica kitchen and alarm system. \$155,000 (L-714) 647-6400
MARKETED BY DOUG & KATHIE

SHOWN BY APPOINTMENT

WEST BLOOMFIELD - Over 2,100 sq. ft. in this townhouse style Condo. Nestled deep in the complex. \$167,777 (F-429) 647-6400
MARKETED BY DOUG & KATHIE

DETROIT - Exceptional home has step down living room, dining room, butlers pantry, updated kitchen. \$207,000 (L-161) 647-6400
MARKETED BY PAT MORGAN

BIRMINGHAM LATHROP 617-6100

IRON 611-1060

WEST BLOOMFIELD 851-1100

ROCHESTER UTICA 739-1300

ROYAL OAK 517-2000

For a career in real estate contact any of the offices above