Actors

from page B1

men and now I'm looking at parts that I'm too old for."

Scott Crownover, a 29-year-old Novi resident, is just starting his career as a full-time actor. He's been in the business for six years.

"I'm directed by God," he said. "I wouldn't have the strength to do it if I wasn't. It's an incredibly tough business and you have to have the faith that something is going to come up and that you're supposed to do it. I decided this is what I was going to do no matter how hard it would be."

Crownover has landed parts at Meadowbrook, Jewish Ensemble Theater in West Bloomfield, Performance Network in Ann Arbor and a lot summer theater, as well as out of state venues.

When there just weren't any parts, Crownover took side jobs, like working as a substitute teacher to pad his income.

"I haven't had to do that a lot," he said. "I'm very, very fortunate."

He's also a member of the unions, Screen Actors Guild and Actors Equity Association, that stipulate if actors work a certain amount of hours they have to be paid a certain amount of money. However, some theaters can't afford to pay union wages.

To stay in the business, Crownover said, actors must believe they have a special talent.

"It's true, you only have one life," he said. "Go for it. Try community theater and different venues while you're working. It's exciting, but be prepared because, there is no job security in acting. You're always waiting for another job. You have to work hard."

Charlotte Leisinger knows the feeling of not having a lot of parts available.

At 59, she's been acting for 40 years, but she had to hold a full-time day job to earn money. She worked for Ameritech, got an early retirement when she was 53 and went to graduate school to earn her master's degree in acting.

She's been a full-time actor ever since.

Her major in college was theater, but after she graduated, she said: "I had to make a living." "The only people who should go into this job should do it because if they don't do it you don't breathe right," she added. "If you're older, it can be frustrating, because there aren't that many parts. The biggest thing is looking for the next job. Acting can be very rewarding. When it goes right there's nothing better."

While she has done a couple of commercials, her true love is to be on stage.

"I didn't retire to sell Ford," Leisinger said. "I retired to do parts in plays."

So, like so many other actors, she calls the actor's union hot line to hear the list of auditions.

"That's basically how it goes – smiling all the time," she said. "If you only do stage work in the Detroit area, you're homeless. Most of the theaters around pay $200 a week with usually six performances Thursday through Sunday. Some are more. Some are less. Meadowbrook pays more. It's impossible to eat and house yourself with that."

A lot of her friends who work as actors hold jobs, like delivering newspapers, waitressing and walking dogs.

"And if they get a call for out of town jobs they can leave without hurting anyone desperately," Leisinger said.

Sandra Love Aldrich always wanted to be an actress. But, she too, had to find a day job to make her dream come true.

"I do primarily live stage and most people who do just live stage unfortunately can't make a living," she said. "Most people keep their 9 to 5 jobs which means you're limited to theaters where they rehearse in the evening."

Three years ago she took an early retirement as a teacher in the Detroit Public School District, so she could pursue her real passion – to act full-time. Being a black, female, actor, she said, limits the number of roles.

"I couldn't quit my job, because there wasn't enough work to sustain me," explained Love Aldrich, who is a single mom of two children.

She studied at the Detroit Repertory Theater, which does nontraditional casting – they don't look at skin color when casting parts.

"We can do a show where I'm black, my mom is white and my husband can be Puerto Rican," she said.

Over the years, Love Aldrich has worked with Detroit Repertory Theater, Plow Shares, Meadowbrook, as well as Wayne State University's Hilberry and Bonstelle theaters among other gigs including dinner theaters. She's also a member of the Actors Equity Association.

Love Aldrich knew she wanted to act when she auditioned for a place in a workshop at the Detroit Repertory Theater. She was older than the sea of young "ingenue types, but I didn't let them threaten me – believe me it was very noticeable."

"It was the mother's speech from *Raisin in the Sun*, and one person was nodding his head in agreement and smiling from ear to ear and I knew what it was like to be an actor," she said describing her fist flirt with acting. "It was the audience appreciation. I got the admiration in his smile. I studied about two years at the Rep. They kicked me out and they said it was time for you to see if you can get work."

Her work honing her craft wasn't over. Newspaper reviews of her first part were lousy, cutting to her heart by saying she had no business even being on stage. After the reviews, she had to muster the courage to keep performing.

"You can't let it get to you, difficult as that may be," she said. "You decide, I don't care."

You can imagine her feelings of vindication, she said, when the same newspaper reviewers voted her the best actress award nine years later.

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The Mike Judge shorts *Frog Baseball* and *Honky Problem* were hits. Recent festivals highlighted the premiers of *The Spirit of Christmas* and *Frosty*, early works from *South Park* creators Matt Stone, Trey Parker and award-winning animator Don Hertzfeld (*Ah L'Amour* and *Rejected*).

Spike Decker and Mike Gribble have been producing and showcasing new animation for over two decades. The Sick & Twisted show plays to sold-out houses regularly around the country and was even referenced in a recent episode of *The Simpsons*.

Here's the festival schedule:

■ Friday-Saturday, Dec. 21-22 – two shows. First show, doors open 7:30 p.m., film 8 p.m. Second show, doors open 10 p.m., film 10:30 p.m.

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