

Talking lizards challenge director and cast

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Joanna Hastings giggles when asked "How do you make talking lizards believable?" As director of Edward Albee's *Seascape*, she's thought about that question a lot. The solution is simple — make them more human. That shouldn't be too difficult since the Pulitzer-winning comedy pairs two humans with two talking lizards in the process of evolving. Actors must simply combine characteristics of the two-legged species with a slithering creature all in time for the opening of the production Friday, Nov. 8, at Trinity House Theatre in Livonia.

"Great actors is how you make talking lizards believable," said Hastings of Ann Arbor. "They're so human in their relationships. We're having fun with the physicality, slithering around the stage. It's a challenge but I've never spent so much time laughing."

The comedy is a break from the plays Hastings directs for the Jewish Ensemble Theatre's program that brings topics like bullying and name calling into the schools. *Seascape* does have a message though. A serious subject lies deep beneath the comic elements of this story about a marriage in crisis. All seems well until the husband (played by Dave Cunningham of Northville) retires. He plans to spend his time relaxing. His wife (Linda Hammell of Lathrup Village) wants to travel from beach to beach.

"It's really the husband's story, how he opens his mind and opts for life," said Hastings. "I've wanted to do this play for a long time. I'm interested in



Linda Hammell and Dave Cunningham (right) can't believe their eyes when they spot two talking lizards on the beach as part of a rehearsal for Edward Albee's *Seascape*. The Trinity House Theatre production opens Friday, Nov. 8 in Livonia. Artist Pat DeBoer of Ferndale will have the lizard costumes painted by then for actors Michael Owen Davis and Elizabeth Lee.

PHOTO BY DON ALLEY

plays on the edge of reality, the dynamics of relationships. It's very compelling because of the excellence of writing, very hon-

est in spite of the weirdness of it."

"It runs deep," adds Elizabeth Lee who plays Sarah the Lizard. "There's a lot of humor, the silly things we do as humans. It finds humor in what it is to be

human and have relationships, our downfalls and what makes us beautiful."

In the end it's the differences that draw the two species together.

"When the two talking lizards

invade their space their view of life is different," said Lee. "The sea creatures are evolving, learning what emotions are. The human is evolving, learning what it is to take risks."

Sarah the Lizard is living underwater and never even seen a seagull. She has a sense they don't belong there anymore so we're exploring and that brings us up on land to discover what birds are, what sky is. It's the imagination, what if a lizard evolved differently."

Lee's experience as an actress is helping her to make that plausible. The Hazel Park resident has performed with Trinity House Theatre for more than eight years in productions such as *Grace & Gloria*. She's done Shakespeare with Water Works Theatre Company in Royal Oak and most recently played a part in Jeff Daniels' new film *Supersticker*. Lee met Hastings at Daniels' Purple Rose Theater. Always striving to improve their craft, the two took a workshop in directing and acting at the theater in Chelsea.

"This play's taught me to

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seize every moment," said Lee. "To make every moment count, to take risks and risk more often and be interested in the differences of other people. Welcome people's uniqueness."

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