

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



Thursday, January 21, 1988 O&amp;E

(O)5C

## New look coming for old playhouse

By Cathie Breidenbach  
Special writer

**T**HIS YEAR the Birmingham Village Players will begin renovating its old playhouse within honking distance of Hunter Boulevard on Chestnut Street.

Players president Donna Masters said the three-stage renovation will cost \$400,000-\$500,000. It will be paid for out of a capital account accrued over the last 10 years, by members' donations and pledges, as well as by fund-raisers and the financial support of Birmingham merchants.

"I think most long-term Birmingham residents and businesses have a loyalty to the players and want to see us succeed, and we want to stay right here in Birmingham," Masters said.

Part two involves raising the roof of the lobby building to two stories and installing a lighting and sound booth upstairs. Finally, the auditorium will be renovated and its roof replaced in the third part of the plan.

"If we knocked the playhouse down and started new, it would possibly be less expensive, but we'd lose all its ghosts and traditions. The membership wanted to keep the tradition and mood of the place," she said.

THE BIRMINGHAM Village Players started in 1923 with 17 people. The playhouse, built three years later, became the nucleus for the thespian group, which will celebrate its 65th birthday in February.

The players is the third oldest community theater group in the state and the oldest in the area. When the players began, Birmingham was a village, hence the name Birmingham Village Players. Member Ed Deer, a retired Birmingham dentist, remembers pasturing his pony just outside the playhouse in those quieter village days.

The group now limits membership to 275 people and brings in 35-40 new people each year as members move away and those who've belonged for 25 years make room for new blood by becoming lifetime members.

"We're always looking for cre-



*'If we knocked the playhouse down and started new, it would possibly be less expensive, but we'd lose all its ghosts and traditions. The membership wanted to keep the tradition and mood of the place.'*

— Donna Masters  
president  
Birmingham Village Players

ative people," Masters said. She admits she's intimidated by the spotlight and she prefers organizing or working on sets and costumes to going on stage.

"There are places within the group for a variety of talents," she said of the players, which boasts in its official history: "There are no castes in our casts, and this month's star may be next month's stagehand, usher or dishwasher."

For the first time in the group's history, tryouts will be open to the public, on Sunday and Monday, for the spring production of "The Boyfriend." The show requires a young cast of singers and dancers. Nostalgia played a part in the board's decision to produce "The Boyfriend" because it was the first musical ever staged at the playhouse.

THE GROUP's next production will be "Picnic," opening Friday. "The Boyfriend" opens Friday, March 18, and "The Girls in 509," Friday, May 20. The Players opened the current season with "The Sunshine Boys" in September, followed by "Pajama Game" in November.

Members of the Birmingham Village Players value tradition and want to preserve memories that haunt the old building. Even when the stage is dark and the auditorium empty, bright murals of stylish people fill the playhouse with good times. Fred Farrar painted the murals on the auditorium walls in 1933.

Yellowing playbills paper the wall near the kitchen and bring to mind some of the more than 400 productions presented on the playhouse stage. In the lobby, framed photographs of past presidents fill nearly

a whole wall, in a lineup that reads like a roster of Birmingham's old families — with several generations of some families.

Dike and Dee Dwelley are both there, with Dike's father who served as president years before him. Photos of Bill McCall and his father, plus two generations of the Underwood family, keep an eye on the garbale in the lobby guarding an arched door that was once the outside door of the playhouse.

Tradition notwithstanding, the building is old and needs repairs. The back wall of the stage looks like a sieve when the wind lashes it from the wrong direction. "On opening night of 'Two by Two,' the story of Noah and the flood, I thought we were going to float Noah's Ark," Masters recalled.

WHILE DOING mop duty during that stormy performance, she resolved to do something about the building when she became president. Now in her second term as president, her resolve is becoming reality.

"We decided instead of putting expensive band-aids on the building, we'd take a survey of what needed to be done and do it right, so it will last a long, long time," she said. The players called in a structural engineer who recommended that Troy architect Tom Pallos design a plan to improve the playhouse without sacrificing its traditions.

"We're a fun-loving creative group," Masters said. Any likely excuse is a reason for the players to get together for fun, so it follows that parties be on the agenda in the players' current efforts to raise money for playhouse renovation. Cast members often party at Pea-



STEPHEN CANTRELL/Staff photographer

Diana McClain is Rosemary Sydney and Sheldon J. Scott is Howard Bevans in the Birmingham Village Players production of the Broadway hit "Picnic." The show opens Friday and

continues Saturday-Sunday and also Friday-Saturday, Jan. 29-30. For ticket information, call 644-2075.

body's after rehearsals. They gather to celebrate the close of each production, as well as holidays and special occasions, such as the 65th birthday party, which will feature a stage production for the members.

Birmingham Village Players

Please turn to Page 7

### WHO'S DON KOSTYU??

Well, if you liked **MARK SCOTT**, former Detroit Radio Talk Host, you'll LOVE Don Kostyu, your new host of "Town Meeting." A talk show that gives you the intellectual armor you need to protect your individual rights.

"Town Meeting" is heard Monday thru Friday from 10 AM to 11 AM on

**W-CAR RADIO**

TALK/INFORMATION ESTIMATED FOREIGN LANGUAGE

**10.90 AM**

Call 421-0767 with your "Town Meeting" Comments and Questions

### NOW FEATURING PRIME RIB

8 oz. Key West Cut \$11.95 16 oz. Marathon Cut \$14.95  
20 oz. Key Largo Cut \$20.95 (If this doesn't fill you up, seconds are on us)

PRIVATE PARTY BANQUET FACILITIES AVAILABLE

**Key Largo**

RESTAURANT

Featuring Winter Dinners

Reservations Suggested 669-1441

142 E. Walled Lake Dr. • Walled Lake

### Baby, It's Cold Outside!



And the Sheraton Oaks is featuring a warm alternative to the falling Winter temperatures .....

#### The Club Sheraton Weekend Package

- Deluxe overnight accommodations
- Complimentary CLUB SHERATON T-SHIRTS and Coffee Mugs
- Full use of recreational facilities, including indoor pool, indoor spa, Fitness Center, Tanning Bed and Complimentary racquetball court time.

**\$55** per room/per night/plus tax

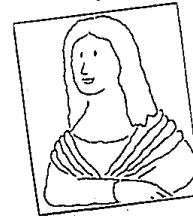
For Reservations **Sheraton-Oaks**  
Call 348-5000

7700 SHERATON DRIVE, NOVATO, CALIF. 94947

Package valid Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings from January 1, 1988 through March 27, 1988 based upon availability and advance reservations. Not valid for groups or with other discounted rates. Two complimentary T-shirts and mugs per registered guest room.

### Something to Smile About!

The Novi Hilton's  
**Feast d'Italiano**  
Our All You Can Eat Italian Buffet  
Fridays from 6 pm to 10 pm



"I even cracked a smile between the fettucine and the cacciatore!"  
— Mona Lisa

You'll smile too when you enjoy the more than 40 taste-tempting Italian Specialties at the Novi Hilton!

Cheeses, Soups, Salads, Pastas & Entrees like — Chicken Cacciatore, Veal Saltimbocca, Shrimp stuffed eggplant and so much more! Not to mention a trip to our sumptuous Dessert Bar!

Adults \$17.95 Children 12 & Under \$11.95  
Reservations Suggested

**349-4000**

The Novi Hilton, 21111 Haggerty Rd.  
(I-275 at the 8 Mile Rd. exit)

### This weekend, getaway to the most fun in Michigan!



- Available Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights
- Luxurious accommodations, outstanding restaurants, lively lounge
- Indoor swimming pool and sauna
- "20 Hilton Money" to spend for refreshments and/or dinner at Hurley's, Charley's Crab and/or The Wicker Works Restaurant

24-hour advance reservations required!

**NORTHFIELD HILTON**

5500 Crooks Road, Troy, MI 48068

(313) 879-2100

One-day advance booking required. Offer valid Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights only May 1, 1988. \*Taxes and gratuities not included. Limited time offer subject to availability.