

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor / 644-1100



Thursday, October 19, 1989 (A&E)

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Bounty on the boards

Farmington Barn Players open with a classic

By Kevin Lawrence
special writer

IT'S HARVEST time and the old Williams barn in Farmington Hills is buzzing with activity. Once again Metro Detroit playgoers will reap the theatrical bounty sown by the Farmington Players as they open their 1989-90 season the evening of Oct. 27, with the classic World War II drama — "Mr. Roberts."

And you won't find the Players standing out in front of the white barn they've called home since 1955 flagging down should-be playgoers from 12 Mile — and dragging them inside.

"When we first started in 1951," Players historian Pearl Briggs recalled with a laugh, "we had to go out on the streets to get folks to watch us. Now we sell out all the time."

"Back then we were known as the American Association of University Women and we performed in the Universalist Church basement. We grew into the Farmington Players by 1955 when we leased the white dairy barn on 12 Mile."

THE "BARN" HAS become a symbol in Southeastern Michigan for good community theater. And while the barn has been improved over the years to its present comfortable state through the combined efforts of many of the group's members, much of the credit goes to the four remaining original founding members.

"Hope and George Nahstoll really started the players and kept things going," said Briggs, who along with husband Don, are also original members and the focus of a tribute this year by the group. "Hope is really Mrs. Farmington Players, the spirit of the group." These last original members pooled \$1,000 each toward a \$10,000 down payment on the purchase of the barn in the early '60s.

Initially, the players performed "in the round" — the audience circled around the actors, in the basement of the barn on a dirt floor. Over the years, various "home" improvements contributed to the comfort of actors and playgoer.

"This place was a real barn. No bathrooms, a dirt floor, no heat and pigeons in the ceiling galore," said Briggs. "We put in a wood floor. The milkroom was remodeled into the kitchen. We added restrooms and eventually got the pigeons to roost elsewhere."

Don Briggs was in on many of those barn improvements.

"HEAT, OF COURSE was a real concern," he explained. "When Our

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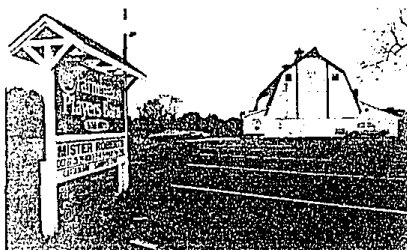
Lady of Sorrows Church was rebuilt, the builder gave us the old coal furnace. We got it over to the barn but it was too big. Well, we got the place heated with the installation of three modern furnaces. Then we built an addition on the rear of the building so we'd have a place to build sets and store costumes. Recently, we rewired all the electrical and brought it up to code."

An interesting sidelight of the remodeling process is the set of old theater chairs being reupholstered for the '89-90 season. Don Briggs explained: "They're quite old. Back when the Masonic Hall was being remodeled, we bought a bunch of these chairs for 50 cents apiece. We're refurbishing them and keeping the old theater look."

The Farmington Players is a non-profit organization and membership is open to all. Membership dues are \$25. Communities represented by the 120 members include Union Lake, Warren, Southfield, Plymouth, Redford, Birmingham, Royal Oak, Bloomfield Hills and Farmington, Farmington Hills. They meet every third Saturday of the month for a short business meeting and a workshop. A workshop might consist of a one-act play where newcomers can hit the boards for the first time, or auditions may be held for an upcoming production.

This season, which runs from October through May consists of three performances. "Mr. Roberts" opens Oct. 27, 28, 29 and continues Nov. 2, 5, 9-12 and 16-18. February sees "Waiting for the Parade" opening on the Feb. 2-4 and running 8-11, 15-18 and Neil Simon's "The Odd Couple" April 27-29, May 3-6, 10-13 and 17-19.

Curtain time for Thursday-Saturday shows is 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday nights tend to be sell-outs so plan on getting tickets early. Tickets are \$6 at the door. Discount season tickets or other ticket information may be obtained by calling 538-1670.



"The Barn" on 12 Mile has become a symbol in Southeastern Michigan for good community theater.



Chuck Fisher (seated) of West Bloomfield plays the part of Doc in the play while Craig Ferhan of Union Lake has the lead role of Mr. Roberts.



photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Striking a teacher-like pose is director Sandra Sutherland of Union Lake. Sutherland actually is a teacher in the Farmington/Farmington Hills public schools.



Carolyn Rourke of West Bloomfield applies makeup for her role as Lt. Ann Girard in the play.

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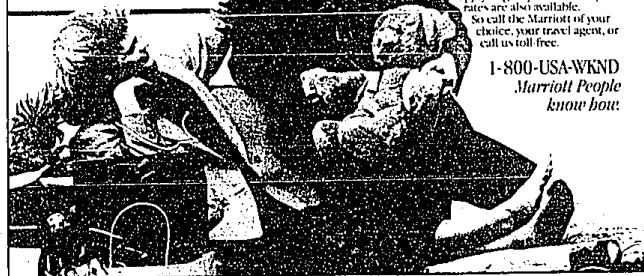
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