

A hefty message

Local teacher's persistence gets film onto screen

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

"Hefty's" is a 30-minute short film with a larger message.

A millionaire takes on the daunting task of trying to break the record for most coneyse eaten in one hour. In the process, the character learns a lot about himself and discovers friendship.

Behind the scenes, though, is an underlying tone of persistence. Executive producer Margaret Culver, who is a special education teacher at Farmington Hills Harrison, gets credit for that.

"If it wasn't for her, it wouldn't be on the screen," said filmmaker John Prusak, who wrote and filmed "Hefty's." "She did all the leg work."

"Hefty's," which was shot in 1993, was destined to lay dormant due to a lack of money. Then two years ago at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado, Culver asked Prusak whatever happened to the project he filmed at Hefty's Coney Island in Redford Township. She offered to stop in.

Culver secured two grants to defray \$30,000 in costs, coordinated the post-production work and turned the film into viewing reality. "Hefty's" premieres Saturday, Jan. 16, at the Redford Theatre in Detroit.

"It seemed it was going to get done one way or another," Culver said. "It was a matter of when it was going to get done."



SHARON LAMARUK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A Hefty task: John Prusak and Margaret Culver stand before the Redford Township restaurant that played a big role in the film they produced.

Arts and Cultural Affairs and the Public Benefit Corporation kicked in additional money. Other money came from private donations.

Then there was the post-production work, which included finding the music, editing, remixing the audio and doing corrections. She likened the project to "weaving 100 threads of raw pieces" together.

"There's more people involved in the filmmaking process," said Culver. "I found it more difficult to keep my hands on all aspects of the filmmaking process."

More films in store

Nonetheless, Culver can't wait

to work on another film. She and Prusak see "Hefty's" as the first installment from a burgeoning film community in the area.

"They also several of the talented people who worked on 'Hefty's,' which includes Sam Raimi (director of the 'Evil Dead' series and 'Darkman') in an acting role and North Farmington graduate Mark Yasenchak as a sound technician.

"There's a lot of industrial (film and video) work being done in this town," said Culver, who is vice-president of the group Detroit Area Film & Television. "It's nice to see people shift their sights from entertainment pieces in the process."

Entertainment was the inspiration for the film. Prusak got the idea joking one day with Jerzy Jankal, whom he worked with at Focal Point Studios.

They talked about the coney-eating record at the restaurant on Grand River and Beech Daly. (At the time, the mark was 18 coneyse. The record is now 19).

Prusak decided to take it a step further and began filming.

"I didn't think too much of the money end of it," said Prusak, who is a former Farmington resident. "That's where I was educated."

Other projects

When money ran out, Prusak

concentrated on other projects. He filmed one-third of the footage in the cult hit "Roger & Me," including the infamous scene with Bob Eubanks telling off-color jokes.

Prusak also completed "Suite Harry" in 1987 that centers on an cellist who is an alcoholic and tries out for the symphony in Detroit. The film won a Cine Gold Eagle.

He also did a documentary, "Walk this Way," on Novi resident Ron Bachman who lost his legs as a child.

Like Culver, Prusak said there's something special about films indigenous to the region.

"This has a character to it," said Prusak, who teaches film and media at William D. Ford Vocational Center in Westland. "These are real people. This is a real place."

"Maybe someday I'll make a film in Peoria and see if it plays in Farmington."

"Hefty's" will be shown 7 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 16, at the Redford Theatre, Grand River Avenue, Detroit. Tickets are \$25, which includes the reception. Proceeds benefit Children's Hospital of Michigan and Detroit Area Film & Television. For information, call 657-3133.

Made a video

The process was rather new for Culver, whose experience is in video work.

The Bloomfield Hills resident produced a video documentary, "Portrait of a Horse Woman," on Pan American gold medalist equestrian rider Carol Grant. She also recently completed a training video, "Special Education Outcome Guide," for the Michigan Department of Education.

The tallest order for "Hefty's" was getting money.

She wrote to five or six places before the Michigan Council

Students to compete in inaugural music festival

Some 84 students from the instrumental music program at North Farmington High School will participate in the "National Events, Presidential Inaugural Music Festival" that is being held in Falls Church, Va., during inaugural week.

The music program is headed by Carl Gippert. There will be 11 other schools from across the nation competing at the festival.

The students will be competing in four separate competitions at the festival. They are the Symphony Band, Chamber Orchestra, Percussion Ensemble, and Flag Corps. Many of the students will

compete with two or three of these groups.

At the festival, the Symphony Band will perform "Jameican Folk Song Fantasy" by John Stout, "Sequoia" by Homer LaGasse, and "Washington Post March" by John Phillip Sousa.

The Chamber Orchestra will perform "Little Suite For Strings" by Carl Nielsen, "Folk Royal Dances" by Eric Ewazen, and "Brandenburg Concerto" by J.S. Bach.

The Percussion Ensemble will perform "Ku-Ka-Illmoku" by Rouse, "String Quart Presto" by Haydn, and "La Negra" by Cahn. The students will leave for

Washington, D.C., Jan. 15 and will arrive home Jan. 21. Students will be accompanied by Gippert and a number of parent chaperones.

During their stay the students will also perform at the U.S. Seclusion and Almen's Home. In addition to their performances, the students will lay a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery.

The students will also tour The White House, the Smithsonian Museums and many other historical sites. They will attend the presidential inaugural thanks to the efforts of U.S. Rep. Joseph Knollenberg, who provided the group with most of his allotted tickets.

RECREATION NEWS

Each week, the recreation division of the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services presents a synopsis of upcoming activities in this column. For further information regarding programs, call the recreation office at 473-9570. For city council agenda items, call the Newsletter at 476-3838.

■ PRESCHOOL ACTIVITIES

A variety of activities for preschoolers ages 1-1/2 to 6 are being offered at the new Day Camp Building in Heritage Park. The activities range from dance, art, and music to tumbling, cooking and day camps. All activities will begin the week of Jan. 18. Refer to the recently distributed program brochure or contact our office at 473-9570 for information.

■ CHILL GOLF OPEN

If you love golf, you'll love this event. A nine-hole golf tournament will be Saturday, Jan. 30, at the San Marino Golf Course. A shotgun starting format will be used beginning at 10 a.m. After completing your round of play, you can eat a hot dog and bowl of chili to warm you up. Fee is \$15 per person with a registration deadline of Jan. 28. Awards based on registration.

■ YOUTH BOWLING

Your child can participate in a learn-to-bowl program for grades 3-5 at Bel-Aire Lanes for four Tuesday afternoons beginning Jan. 19 4-5:30 p.m. or a bumper bowling program for children ages 4-7 for 10 weeks on either a Thursday, Friday or Saturday. The learn-to-bowl program will concentrate on developing the correct approach, delivery and lane courtesy. The bumper bowling activity will help develop strength, coordination, interaction and fun. There are three bowlers per team, and one adult for supervision is required. For further information, call the recreation office at 473-9570.

■ EUCHE TOURNAMENT

Get your partner and register for the euche tournament at the Heritage Park Day Camp Building 7-10 p.m. Friday, Jan. 29. You will play a "round robin" format that will allow you to play the entire evening. Awards will be based on the number of teams that register. Refreshments provided. Pre-registration required by Jan. 26. \$10 per team.

■ DADDY-DAUGHTER DANCE

A memorable evening is awaiting dad and his daughter from 7-8:30

p.m. on Friday, Feb. 12, or Saturday, Feb. 13, at the Mercy Center. This fun-filled evening includes dancing, refreshments, corsage for daughter(s), boutonniere for dad and a picture of the couple. Pre-registration is required as space is limited. Fee is \$15 per couple and \$7.50 per additional daughter.

■ LECTURE SERIES

Attend one or all four of the lectures that will aid you when journeying into the legal world. Ms. Majorie Mantel Mergerian, attorney-at-law, will lead you through each topic using layman's terms. The series will be Wednesday, Jan. 20 — selecting a lawyer; Wednesday, Jan. 27 — small claims court; Wednesday, Feb. 3 — preparing for the future; and Wednesday, Feb. 10 — landlord, tenant. All lectures are from 7-9 p.m. at the Heritage Park Day Camp Building. Fee is \$10 per lecture or \$30 for all four.

■ PARKEY SERIES

Children ages 4-9 can join Parkey the Panda to celebrate Valentine's Day on Saturday, Feb. 6 from 10-11:30 a.m. The day's activities will include an art project, games, snack and a visit by Parkey. Pre-registration fee of \$7 per child required.

FURTHER REDUCTIONS

OUR FAMOUS
sale
SEMIANNUAL
50-60% off
our original prices

Now is the Time to Save at Talbots Kids at Somerset Collection

Hurry in to Talbots Kids for even greater savings on fall and winter clothing in boys' sizes 4-12 and girls' sizes 4-14.

Quantities are limited. Intermediate markdowns may have been taken



Playtime, partytime, anytime clothes for boys and girls.

TALBOTS KIDS, Somerset Collection (adjacent to Talbots), Big Beaver Road at Coolidge Highway, Troy, MI. 649-9310