

SUBURBAN LIFE

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KATIE KENNY

Volunteering spells success

"To laugh often and much; . . . to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better; . . . to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I'd like to think I have succeeded in life. I've almost graduated. I've played on the varsity teams. Almost all the homework has been done. But beyond that, I've succeeded in other areas, in places I've never dreamed of succeeding.

Every Tuesday evening I walk into a room of young people who enjoy life more than anyone I know. This group smiles more, laughs more, hugs more, tries more than I could ever do. This is a group of physically and mentally handicapped young adults who are involved in music therapy. Their name is the Fine Chimes and no one group of people has ever made such an impact on my life.

Special gift

I heard about these kids through my church and decided it would be a great article for my school newspaper. How touching, I thought. People would love to hear about a group of handicapped kids involved in an extracurricular activity.

I walked into one practice, a little nervous at first, and took a seat in the back row.

Karen entered and tried to get everyone's attention. Her news was that she was getting a new mattress for her bed. Everyone seemed excited for her by all the screams and applause.

Christi walked in, ran straight to her boyfriend, Kevin, and gave him a hug.

Greg spoke about his birthday the next week and his plans to bring in cupcakes for all of them.

I soaked the whole evening in. I listened to them encouraging one another for climbing small mountains. I saw them smiling. And I saw them loving.

I sat amazed at their expressions of undying optimism.

Music therapy

But then I watched as their leader, their friend, Pat Morris-Weaver, touch them through the music, and I started to understand. She grabbed her guitar and started to play the "Name Song." All the kids began to dance in their seats as she asked each of them to spell out their addresses and their phone numbers. They spelled them out to the beat of the music, and there were looks of satisfaction after each one had completed their part of the song.

They then began to play the chimes. The group was practicing "The Phantom of the Opera" for an upcoming performance. As they went through the song, Pat called Jason's name every time he had to sing his line. After calling his name several times, Pat went over to him. "It's hard work. Is it hard work, Jason? He nodded. "That's good that I only had to call your name three times. You're doing a great job."

As I gathered together my notes, I promised I would return. Christi ran over to shake my hand before she left. Karen told me to drive safely. I did return the next week because I needed a few more quotes and a picture or two. The next, to deliver the article in the paper. And the next week because I belonged.

Hugs and kisses

Even though some of them can't remember my name, each Tuesday they give me hugs and kisses as if I were related to them. They're such genuine spirits, I can't help but be amazed at their capacity to love another human being, without even knowing their name.

I also see the true meaning of inner peace in this group. I see such self-confidence in these kids. They love themselves and they love their gifts. They are at peace with themselves and it shows through their work.

The group has been a constant inspiration to me through their acknowledgement of each other's successes. What may seem unimportant to one may be monumental for another, and that never goes unnoticed. No accomplishment is ever too small. They even notice when I get my hair cut.

Sweet success

After each practice, I get in my car with a smile on my face and think about what just happened. I will live in the idea that the times I feel the best about myself and the most inspired is the short hour I spend with them each week. I've come to realize true happiness cannot be achieved alone, but through the relationships I allow myself to have.

Ah, success. Who was I talking about again? Oh, yes, I think I was talking about myself. I

See VOLUNTEER, 5C



ANN HEALEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Sensual scenes: Elizabeth Racer, playing Cecile and John Demerrell, playing Valmont, heated the stage at the Farmington Players Barn during a recent dress rehearsal of *Dangerous Liaisons*.

Lights, camera, coffee

Wanted: Actors who can park cars



The Farmington Players have been entertaining for 43 years. Members recall stories that will be repeated for many more years to come. The members take turns acting and performing the variety of duties involved.

BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

It isn't all line memorization and stage entrances for Farmington Players members.

One day they're actors. The next day they're painting stage props, directing traffic in the parking lot, serving coffee during intermission, or doing any number of odd jobs. All this creates the intricate threads in a resilient fabric that makes up the Farmington Players, a community group that has entertained audiences for 43 years.

For every person on stage, there are at least five people behind the scenes, according to David Gilkes, Farmington Players Barn president.

The community group was born in 1951, when a dramatic study group of the American Association of University Women set out to stir up interest in amateur theater. Four decades later, new performers have joined and some of the original group are still involved.

"We all volunteer and we pay in our time, sweat and tears," said Gilkes, who is among the 136 members from Farmington, Farmington Hills, Livonia, West Bloomfield, Birmingham and other communities.

"We're a recognized entity, because of the longevity."

Pearle Briggs - who, with her husband, Don, has been a Farmington Players member since 1953 - attributes much of the group's success to one of the founders, Hope Nahstall, who now lives in a nursing home and is no longer involved.

"She was the inspirer," Pearle Briggs said. "It's because of her that we kept it going all these years."

Pitching in

Everything about the Farmington Players appeals to the community. Chairs were donated by Botsford Hospital and the Masonic Temple. Props, a refrigerator and furniture were given by various business people and residents. The group rents out props and costumes to area high schools.

The theater welcomes patrons in an intimate setting complete with a cozy stage in a converted dairy barn on 12 Mile between Farmington Road and Orchard Lake.

The Farmington Players leased and then bought the barn in the early days.

"During the first performance, the pigeons were in the hayloft," Pearle Briggs said. "The lofts were

full of pigeon doo and hay."

The barn-life residue is gone, but the country-like theater maintains a sense of intimacy with seating for 172 people - and some people in the audience close enough to prop their feet on the stage.

Community support is overwhelming, too, with an average 80 percent of the seats sold for each performance. The regulars keep coming back year after year. More than 900 people are on a list of season ticket holders.

Legendary stories

The behind-the-scenes stories echo like ghosts in the rafters. Don Briggs recalled a performance once in 1983, when there was a power shortage at Farmington and 12 Mile roads. Briggs, who was president of the group at the time, went on stage and talked to the audience until the lights were restored.

And some of the members will never forget the times a goat and pigs were given parts. The goat was piggies to stare at the audience and often stole the show.

Another time a mouse crawled through a knothole in the floor and made an unannounced appearance during a performance. None of the actors missed a cue.

"It does a lot for the people who belong to it," Pearle Briggs said of the group. "And it does a lot for the community. It is a club and we all have the commonality of the stage."

Don Briggs adds that the

Farmington Players Barn gives people a chance to feel what it's like to perform. Ages range from high school students to octogenarians. And the spectrum of stage experience is just as wide.

"A lot of people have had some experience in school or college," Don Briggs said. "And a lot stay around three or four years."

Romance bloomed on stage, too. "We've got quite a few people who met, got married and stayed on," Don Briggs said.

Despite what was happening behind the scenes, including power outages and other acts of nature, the show always went on. Just as it will later this month and through May, when the Farmington Players will present "Les Liaisons Dangereuses" by Christopher Hampton, April 29, 30, May 1, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20 and 21. Curtain times are 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays; and 2 and 7 p.m. Sunday.

Also known as "Dangerous Liaisons," the play takes the audience back to France of the 1780s. Two French aristocrats bring new meaning to the comment that all's fair in love and war.

The show is directed by Nancy Harrower and features Paula Myers, John DeMerrell, Jill Lamphere, Mary Ann Tweedie, Elizabeth Racer, B.J. Alpern, Alan Madeleine, Genevieve Terry, Beth Cole, Dave Gilkes, Marie Taylor-Kidd and Bruce Madsen.

For more information or reservations, call 553-2955.

The price is right at auction fund-raiser

BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Two area organizations, Farmington Meals on Wheels and the Farmington Advisory Council, Extravaganza, sponsored by the Women of North Farmington.

The 50-some members are gearing up for the group's biggest fund-raiser of the year from 7-11 p.m. Saturday, April 23, in the Muirwood Apartments Clubhouse.

"We hope to at least reach the goal of \$7,000," which was raised last year, according to Norma Bauman, Women of North Farmington president.

"It's a fund-raiser to support these two groups," Bauman said, adding that she recently heard from an organizer of the Meals on Wheels program that the contribution made by the Women of North Farmington has been important to the survival of the program.

For more than eight years the Women of North Farmington has donated a total of between

\$14,000 and \$15,000, Bauman said.

This year promises to be a success, too. More than 300 items have been donated, according to Jean Bierma, club publicity chairperson.

Guests will be offered chances to bid for 19 hotel stays in Canada, Las Vegas, Chicago and throughout Michigan including the Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills; dinners for two at more than 28 restaurants; golfing packages; watches and other jewelry; in-line skates; and oil paintings.

Other items donated by more than 200 businesses include: luggage; two train trips, one donated by Farmington businesses, Kay Britten Travel and McGraw Travel in Farmington; afghans; framed artwork; snack tables; pottery by Farmington artist John Glick; and bird feeders.

Bidders will also have a chance at country craft items and children's toys, china and other kitchen and dining room items, collectors' dolls, and a variety of other items, said Ann Oppert-Hauser, event organizer.

"We did get wonderful response from people,"

she said. "Muirwood Apartments also donated the hall to our worthwhile cause."

Winners of a raffle, held the night of the auction, will receive a train trip and two nights at the Lennox Hotel in Chicago, two nights at the Fremont Hotel in Las Vegas, and a one-night stay at the Kingsley Inn in Bloomfield Hills.

The Women of North Farmington is a social group and service organization. In an effort to boost its coffers, members strive to raise money for organizations by charging themselves more than the cost of every function they sponsor, which includes weekend trips and outings.

All the money is then donated to Meals on Wheels, the Farmington Advisory Council, and to support Goodfellow's programs.

Meanwhile, the group also wants to boost its membership figures.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the Women of North Farmington is invited to call Ann Oppert-Hauser at 653-2255.