Tinderbox from page E1

Set in the 1920s pre-flapper era, "Cheaper by the Dozen" is a laugh-a-minute with dad, the efficiency expert, showing the kids the proper way to take a bath. Not fond of popular culture, Frank Sr. balks at his daughters wearing lipstick and rouge.

"It's funny and a wonderful family story," said Gryniewicz. "The three oldest girls are teenagers and boy crazy. They want to wear perfume and silk stockings. It's a good history lesson about how life and culture have changed."

Elyse may not have the premise for the play quite right but she's having a good time. One of the favorite sayings by Frank Sr. is that everything, candy or kids, comes cheaper by the dozen.

"It's a story about how it's cheaper to buy a dozen kids than to buy one or two kids," said Elyse.

This is Elyse's fourth time on the Masonic stage. She's been acting since age 4. Previous roles in Tinderbox Productions' "Once Upon a Shoe," "Annie" and the "Ted Sullivan Variety Show" prepared the All Saints' kindergartner for a speaking part as one of the Gilbreth children.

Gryniewicz previously acted at Walled Lake Western High School and Michigan Technological University, where she had roles in "Cabaret" and "The Palms Game."

'I only have five lines as the doctor giving the father bad news about his health, but it's scary.'

Rich Bezerko
Actor

In addition to playing the housekeeper, Gryniewicz is also cueing the sound just like she did at Walled Lake Western High School. After graduating from college, she went back to the high school to teach chemistry and coach the cheerleaders. She also worked with the drama department there cueing the sound.

Family affair

Father and daughter team Rich and Mara Bezerko of Farmington Hills also have small parts in the production. Rich is a little nervous because this is his first time on stage even though he watched daughter Elizabeth play the lead role in Tinderbox's "Annie" earlier this year.

"I only have five lines as the doctor giving the father bad news about his health, but it's scary."

Cactus from page E1

a perennial bachelor," said Lane. "His nurse is very devoted and dedicated but she's very unfeminine. He's a playboy that told his current girlfriend he's married. Julian asks his nurse to pose as his wife to say they're getting divorced. She's enjoying the role playing and makes things come to a climax in the play. The challenge is the character starts out as inhibited. At the end she's liberated. It's making that transition smoothly that's difficult.

"It's very funny but there are some real and tender moments. I like that shift because it draws people in on a lot of levels. People can relate to the characters."

Lying dentist

Brian Taylor, a Plymouth resident, is the lying dentist who's fallen in love.

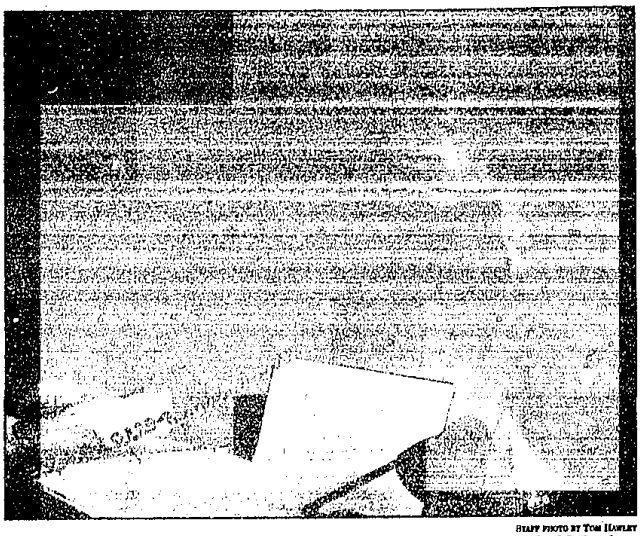
"He's been seeing Toni Simmons for about a year because marriage scares him," said Taylor. "His girlfriend tries to kill herself and he just gets in deeper and deeper with his lies when she wants to meet the kids."

The most difficult aspect of the role for Taylor is playing an older man. Taylor is 26, Dr. Winston is in his 40s.

"I find it difficult to slow him down," said Taylor.

Taylor's first exposure to acting came when he took acting classes from Hartman. He'd wanted to audition for plays while a student at Plymouth Salem High School but was "too scared."

"The theater and acting classes gave me the confidence by just training in basic scenes," said Taylor.



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HAWLEY

Back in time: *James Hartman cues the lights and sound for a rehearsal of Schoolcraft College's "Cactus Flower."*

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Village Players have fun fooling 'Sherlock Holmes'

BY STEVE KOWALSKI
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Tim Wittlinger has practiced law for 35 years and as a hobby he's spent the last 33 of those acting in and directing plays with The Village Players of Birmingham.

He knows what you're thinking about the law and acting fields.

"They're one and the same," he said, joking, before giving his real opinion on the subject.

"In spite of the general opinion that a lot of acting is needed to practice law, it's a lot more technical profession than one might think," said Wittlinger, a partner with the Clark-Hill law firm. "There's a lot more to it than standing in front of a jury and trying to emotionally persuade them to your side."

But like a courtroom, the theater has a jury and it's seated in front of the stage. Wittlinger likes the challenge of entertaining a crowd and the next play he'll direct is "Sherlock Holmes," opening Friday at The Village Players theater in Birmingham.

Comedy

Unlike the Sherlock Holmes famous mystery novels, this one is more of a comedy, a "farce" and not a mystery, according to Wittlinger.

Holmes (played by Gregg Watkins) and Dr. Watson (Wayne Yashinsky) try to protect Alice Faulkner (Ashley Gaum), who has in her possession important documents.

Madge Larrabee (Diana McClain) and James Larrabee (Christopher Crossen) are interested in the expensive documents and they lure Professor Moriarity (Tom D'Agostino) to their team.

Sidney Prince (Stephen Leonard) is the go-between and one of the play's funniest characters, trying to arrange the heist.

"He's a 'bumbling criminal,' a real comic," Wittlinger said.

Holmes' humor comes across more subtly, but Wittlinger hopes, just as entertaining. For instance there's the time Holmes announces he hears a knock at the door before the actual knock.

"I hope it's a funny part — if not I've made a mistake," he said. "It accentuates his observational abilities that we've all read about."

The cast also includes Gary Temple of Plymouth in the role of Parsons.

Wittlinger said he likes directing and acting the same because he gets different rewards from each.

"I certainly don't do it for the money," he said. "It's not a pay proposition. I get enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment when acting because you're building a character. As director, you get to interpret the show in the way it should be artistically created."

Family twist

The play has a family twist.

Ashley Gaum, who plays Alice, and Lorne Gaum, who plays Billy, a teenage errand runner, are the children of co-producer Stephanie Yashinsky.

Stephanie Yashinsky is married to Wayne Yashinsky, who plays Dr. Watson.

"There's nothing better for the family than theater," co-producer Maureen Cook of Bloomfield Hills said. "It's a unique experience for them. It's a fabulous cast and we've got a lot of new, young members which is exciting."

There also is a family connection to acting in Wittlinger's family, though not for this play.

His 25-year-old son David, who lives in Colorado, acts on the side. Ironically, he played a lawyer in his most recent play. Wife Diane and daughter Kristine are more content to watch.

"I gave him some tips (on how to play a lawyer)," the elder Wittlinger said, laughing. "I'm not sure he took them."

What: "Sherlock Holmes"
When: 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 17-18, March 24-25, March 31 and April 1; 2 p.m. Sunday March 19 and March 26
Where: The Village Players Theatre, 752 Chestnut Street, Birmingham (two blocks south of Maple Road on the east side of Woodward Avenue)
Tickets: $12 each. For reservations, call (248) 644-2075