



THE ENTERTAINER

By Rebekah Tadych

What does an electrical engineering degree have to do with cotton candy and ferris wheels? For **Doug Schmidt '83 BS**, an electrical engineering degree fits in with the family business: carnivals.

Sherman Schmidt, Doug's father, started working in the carnival world in 1966. Now 57 years later, all four siblings, along with their children and spouses, are still in the outdoor amusement business. They subdivide the business, now called Schmidt Amusements, into two separate carnival units, with Doug as manager of one unit and brother Terry as manager of the other.

Doug Schmidt is still using the electronic skills he learned at NMU to work on the rides. "Rides are controlled more and more by electronics. In the past 20 years we have seen a big increase in the circuit boards and electronic games used in our



carnivals," says Schmidt.

But his daily routine doesn't just involve checking the electronics. From April to October, every weekend and sometimes more, Doug and his team of 60 employees will create mini carnival worlds in towns across Michigan. In five months, they set up and tear down some 24 events. "I oversee everything and help wherever needed. My three sons also do plenty of work," says Schmidt.

These mini towns require a lot of planning. Starting with an empty field, Schmidt says, "I lay out the location and lot. Once everything is set up and running, I keep track of how things are going."

Then after the long weekend of running the carnival, Schmidt's team will tear down the Tilt-A-Whirl, Merry-Go-Round, lemonade stand and popcorn wagon. Only after loading up the game booths, stuffed ani-

mals and cotton candy will they drive to the next town to repeat the same process throughout the season.

In the winter months, the Schmidt staff performs annual maintenance on the rides at their large facility in Standish, rents out equipment to groups for special events (even outdoor carnivals), and plans for a new year of fairs, festivals and celebrations.

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"I definitely enjoyed my four years at NMU and love the U.P., even if I can't make it there much anymore." (His brother's unit will be setting up at the Marquette County Fair in August.)

With some 30 years in the carnival business, there are bound to be some changes. "When I went to college, we had punch cards, and a computer used to take up an entire room. Everyone went to the county fair. Now that doesn't happen. Kids have more thrills riding a roller coaster online than coming out to the carnival. It's hard to get them out of the house and away from their hand-held devices," Schmidt says.

Despite changes in the way children engage in entertainment, the Schmidt family plans to remain in the carnival business for the long haul—battling Wiis, Xboxes and iPads with Gravitrons, Hi-Strikers and elephant ears—and winning. ■

Theater with a breeze

By Kristi Evans



Nikke Nason, Rita Hodgins, Reatha Tweedie and Peggy Frazier in front of the theater.

Lake Superior Theatre became an unintended legacy of Marquette's sesquicentennial celebration, but has proved successful and sustainable, marking its 15th anniversary at the Frazier boathouse. It began with what was supposed to be a limited run of a single production. The sesquicentennial planning committee commissioned NMU Professor Shelley Russell to write a historical musical about the city's heritage. *Beacon on the Rock*, with music by her NMU colleague Rob Engelhart, shared the experience of immigrant families arriving at this harsh, isolated region in search of a better life. For added authenticity, the committee wanted to hold the performances at the lower harbor, where the settlers landed.

"We considered anchoring a tent, but realized it might not withstand the howling south winds and wouldn't block out enough light with the late sunsets, which is required for theatrical lighting," says Peggy Frazier, former