

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.

Doug and his team of 60 employees create mini carnival worlds in towns across Michigan. In five months, they set up and tear down for some 24 events.

“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

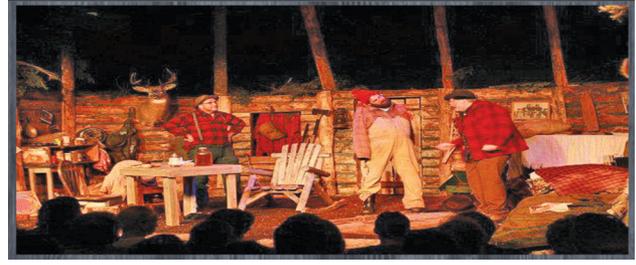
By Kristi Evans



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



Fifteen years of performances have taken place in the boathouse, including *The Christmas Schooner* (left) and *Escanaba in Love*.

NMU Health Center pharmacist whose husband Pete and son Peter own the boathouse. She serves on the LST board with **Rita Hodgins '60 BS** and **Reatha Tweedie '89 BS**, both of whom were involved in the premiere of *Beacon*.

The trio debated other locations until stepping foot inside the Fraziers' working boathouse. They somehow managed to look beyond the *Pelican*—a 50-foot Carver in storage, along with nautical accessories, artifacts and tools—and envision it as a performance space. The work required to transform it in time was daunting, but they pulled it off.

"It was a successful run and the public response was fantastic," says Tweedie, former arts and culture director for the City of Marquette. "We never dreamed it would become an annual activity, but we had a lot of fun doing it and realized the community needed this and would support it."

Hodgins adds, "That fall, we decided to form a board and become a 501c3 organization. It was a leap of faith, but we knew people are hungry for live theater and would appreciate the unique experience of seeing it in a boathouse. It's rewarding to see area residents bring guests to a show. You can tell how proud they are to share this with their visitors."

LST remains committed to showcasing the area's heritage by commissioning other original plays that have been interspersed among familiar Broadway titles. It also maintains a symbiotic relationship with NMU. Students gain internship opportunities and, along with faculty and staff, comprise much of the cast and crew.

Still, much has changed in 15 years. The season expanded in duration and number of productions. This year's lineup consists of four musicals: the signature *Beacon on the Rock*; the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera *Pirates of Penzance*; a youthful take on the Ugly Duckling story titled *Honk Jr.*; and *Superior Broadway*, a cabaret featuring songs and scenes from past LST historical productions, along with numbers from U.P. songwriters.

Audience surveys have resulted in air conditioning, padded seating and more upscale outdoor bathrooms. The

process of preparing the boathouse has also been improved. Most of the stage remains intact year-round, with only a front-and-center section removed to squeeze in the *Pelican's* bow. Rails that guide the boat to her winter storage are removed and replaced with a concrete floor.

A more recent change is the addition of Lake Superior Youth Theatre (LSYT). Participants recently wrote and presented an original play, *A Man Named Marquette*, to benefit the restoration of the Father Marquette statue.

"It was part of our strategic planning to incorporate youth theater, knowing the city didn't have the capacity to support it," says Tweedie. "There's an incredible pool of young talent in the community. We offer year-round programs and summer camps. This serves as a feeder program for high school, community and university productions."

Nikke Nason '02 BS, '13 MPA, who formerly worked at the Marquette Arts and Culture Center and has directed numerous youth productions, was hired full time as artistic director for LSYT and business manager for LST.

"Theater isn't part of the school curriculum right now," Nason says. "A lot of youth aren't exposed to it regularly, but the skills it teaches can be instrumental in the future workplace. And for several kids, it's like a home where they feel accepted. Many have said that theater saved them. It's important to provide safe places for youth and some funding foundations recognize the value for kids and the community as a whole."

The parent organization also benefits the community. Frazier says it not only adds to the list of available arts and cultural opportunities, but also serves as an economic catalyst.

"Lake Superior Theatre, along with the new boat tours of our spectacular waterfront, the condos and the downtown restaurants and museums, all have contributed to revitalizing lower harbor and building a critical mix for tourism that will make it more economically viable. My husband's ancestor, Peter White [one of the original settlers], often remarked that we do not own property, but are temporary custodians for future generations. Sharing the boathouse with the community during the summer honors his memory." ■