

# Long Island

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## It's musical teen-work

By WILLIAM NEUGEBAUER



ONE MIGHT HARDLY THINK that a mountain of heavy-duty cardboard, wooden planks, old clothes, grease paint, and other theatrical artifacts could be used to instill such lofty qualities as self-discipline and a spirit of cooperation among teenagers, but in Port Washington it becomes virtually a community project this time of year.

The mass endeavor in this generally affluent North Shore village of 40,000, with its gentle hills, tree-shaded roads, and utilitarian main street, visibly comes to bear next month in a production of Frank Loesser's Broadway hit musical, "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying," the ninth annual offering of the Port Washington Teen Summer Theatre program.

For the 100 youngsters — who are 12 to 18 years old and over — involved and the legion of local residents, merchants, businessmen, and civic and religious groups helping to sponsor it, the staging effort serves as a sort of subplot perhaps more revealing of human interchange than the play itself.

"There's a warm feeling among the participating youngsters that seems to come to full bloom as the opening nears," says Pamela (Pam) Meadows, the ebullient, 30-year-old director who, with her husband, Ronald, 40, have guided the fortunes of the vibrant, young-troupe

since it staged its initial production of the Cole Porter musical, "Anything Goes," in 1972.

The Meadows, whose only child, Christopher, 13, will be running the lights in this year's show, have strong roots in the community and are board members of the Play Troupe of Port Washington, a vintage theatrical group that co-sponsors the teen summer theater.

"There's a special dynamism among these youngsters, way beyond just tolerance, that seems to be knitting into the local folklore, and the way they pitch in has got to put them in good stead for later life," Pam said.

Her husband Ron, who produces the shows, said the teens' dedication is an offshoot of their own resolve to stage musicals as a constructive summer pastime.

"Some of the children, like the ninth graders, are old enough to shoulder some responsibility but still too young to get summer jobs, so they get involved in the teen summer theater as a way of venting their energies, and whether they be on-stage, in the orchestra or behind the scenes, they develop a spirit of cooperation and mutual regard that is truly refreshing in our days," Ron said.

The Meadows said casting calls went out last May through correspondence, flyers, word-of-mouth and notices in the local newspaper, and that rehearsals for the musical which will be presented Aug.

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By William Neugebauer

Stage Director Pam Meadows gives actors suggestions from her notebook during rehearsal.



Ron and Pam Meadows look over stage model for the production of "How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying"

## Two help keep act together

RON MEADOWS SLEPT fitfully under an August moon, a cool summer breeze caressing his face while the unnerving drone of motorcycles along the town's main drag intruded upon his slumber. No, he knew, they weren't the "Hell's Angels" variety, but the local high school and college-age kids camped out and held parties in the vicinity, creating what cops and homeowners charged was an intolerable noise level.

But Meadows had other thoughts on his mind as he lay in his campsite beneath the stars down by the town dock.

He was a self-appointed watchdog, keeping a nocturnal guard on the wood and cardboard sets at the John Phillip Sousa bandshell that would soon reverberate to the wistful tunes of the Cole Porter musical, "Anything Goes." It was 1972, and the infant Port Washington Teen Summer Theater program was about to launch its initial production outdoors.

Ron Meadows was not about to let anyone monkey with the sets.

"Yes," he recalled yesterday, "it wasn't the best of situations and I would've preferred being sed at home, but it was a beginning. As it happened, the actors had to learn to project their voices above the roar of the motorcycle."

### Troupe moves indoors

That was eight years ago, and the thriving troupe of talented teenagers and college-age youths have moved indoors to the auditorium of Schreiber High School

on Campus Drive, off Port Washington Blvd., where they will stage the musical "How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" for four performances next month.

Ron, director of systems and programming at Publishers Clearing House in Port Washington, and his wife, Pam, a playwright and certified teacher in speech and theater, are living legends in local theatrical circles. For the past eight winters, they have produced a yearly show for and by grade-school children at the Main St. School in their community. They also have been active down the years in the Play Troupe of Port Washington, founded in 1927, which blends adults with younger children in productions designed for family audiences.

### Do hit musical every summer

"The Teen Summer Theater was launched in response to children involved in the winter productions who wanted something to do in the summer," Pam explained. "To date, more than 1,000 youngsters 12 through 18, and some alumni of college age, have participated in the shows. We do a hit Broadway musical each summer, and each production has had the support of parents and the entire community."

She said the summer operation is self-sustaining in that the youngsters raise the costs of sets, royalties and

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## 'How to Succeed' is in the wings

The Port Washington Teen Summer Theater program will present a production of the Broadway hit musical, "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying," as its sixth annual offering Friday through Monday, Aug. 15 through 18, in the auditorium at Schreiber High School on Campus Drive, off Port Washington Blvd. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. Tickets at \$1 each are on sale from cast members or at the door. For more information, call (516) 883-7288.



Violinist Peter Lifson, 16, with alto/horn players Greg Thymus, 15, Ken Sawicki, 15, Wendy Wachler, 16, and Pam Scobbo, 21 on piano practice for the musical.



Actors (l. to r.) Dieter Schapel, 17, Peter Royston, 16, Jeri Roentree, 16, and Chris Koldewey, 17, enjoy trying on their costumes.

## The plays' their thing

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rentals through local sponsors and ticket sales.

Pam's family has lived in Port Washington for three generations. As the former Pamela Papisidero, she attended St. Peter's School, Weber Junior High and Schreiber High School. She was graduated with honors from Queens College and earned a master's degree in educational theater at Adelphi University in Garden City. Her husband has lived in Port Washington since 1963 and was graduated from Schreiber High and Hofstra University in Hempstead.

"I work in town, and that makes it possible for me to keep in touch with all phases of the productions," Ron advised. "I take part of my vacation in mornings off, supervising construction of the sets."

### Other theatrical interests

In their spare time, Ron runs the lights for the Port Singers' productions and serves on the Bandshell Committee while his wife helps produce shows presented by the Congregational Church and chairs the drama department of the Creative Arts Workshop, a nonprofit community group.

The Meadows' were cited two years ago as citizens of the year for their contributions to community life by the Port Washington Community Chest.

In presenting the award, Chest president Albert Lingelbach noted that the couple's efforts permitted young people

## Musical teen-work a hit

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15 through 18 at Port's Schreiber High School on Campus Drive began July 10 at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior, Franklin and Evergreen Aves.

"Our young people have a genuine respect for one another and of others' rights and property," Pam said. "For instance, they invented a rather rugged game with a half-inflated beach ball that they played in the church basement between their theatrical chores, and they worked up a big sweat by the time they surfaced. Yet they were so quiet playing you could hear a pin drop. And there's no mess lying around from the snacks they pick up at the deli."

The theatrical learning experience also delights audiences that have packed the 600-seat school hall during past shows that have included "Bye Bye Birdie" (1973), "Red Hot and Blue" (1974), "Guys and Dolls" (1975), "Oliver" (1976), "On the Town" (1978) and last summer's offering, "Once Upon a Mattress."

### Low production costs

Production costs average about \$3,000, and usually are defrayed through \$10 public sponsorships, the Meadows said, although they singled out and lauded Port Washington real estate broker Robert Harding for underwriting some hefty custodial and maintenance costs resulting from a school austerity cut two years ago.

"These youngsters spare nothing going out and drumming up the needed money," Ron said. "You'll even see them at the railroad station with sandwich signs advertising the show. Those who do better soliciting sponsors—like neighbors,

friends and store owners—will help those less successful, showing them a few of their own selling tactics. And parents themselves go out getting sponsors."

At first, Ron said, the shows were given free, then a 50-cent admission was charged as a means of "crowd control," but rose to the present \$1 cost four years ago in step with the inflationary spiral.

Pam said the youngsters "insist" on preparing costumes, set and scenery on their own, in some cases under adult supervision, and that the diversity in ages helps to widen friendships with older youths, in contrast to associating just with children their own ages at school.

"They're getting out of their grade-school environment and are becoming more competitive, more grown-up and goal-oriented with new dimensions," Pam said. "Right now, the youngsters are working on a giant art-deco set, using heavy cardboard and canvas, and they'll be borrowing some old clothes for costumes or picking them up in a thrift shop. They'll help one another out with costuming and makeup or propping up stage planks on two-by-fours. No one's confined to a special task, and don't be surprised to see one of the performers ducking from the stage into the orchestra to play some musical passage. It's all part of the togetherness."

Pam said the youngsters are not permitted to participate in the summer program beyond the first year of high school graduation, but a gaggle of college-age people return yearly to play in the 18-piece orchestra under musical director Philip Glover, serve as assistant producers and directors, help construct sets, dole out tickets and refreshments and act as door watchers.

"One of the older girls working with me is probably one of the finest carpenters you'll ever meet," Ron said. "There's a great esprit de corps among these youngsters, and they keep in touch, like holding a reunion. Fact is, you never know how many of them will be ringing our front bell during the holidays."

Some of the alumni, he said, have gone on to major in music and theater in college and others, like Robert Fieldsteel, now working with John Cassavates in Hollywood, have turned professional. Alumni are restlessly inventive and also have staged musical revue fund-raisers to demonstrate their enthusiasm and support of the program.

"It's a unique experience for everyone, without any outside compulsion, and we work as hard as we want to," said Andrew Batten, 18, who next month plays the part of J. B. Biggley, a corporation president who steadies his nerves by knitting covers for his golf clubs. "Until curtain time, I'll help build the sets and round up some sponsors."

Peter Royston, 16, who will play employe Bud Frump, the role portrayed on Broadway by Charles Nelson Reilly, said the three years he has been involved in the program has deepened his understanding and appreciation of other people.

Chris Meadows said he has been around the troupe since his parents founded it but joined formally last year. An eighth grade student at John Philip Sousa Junior High in Port Washington, he also helps build the sets.

"We all feel great enjoyment helping one another, so you might consider us as one big family. Yeah, I guess that's it. One big family."

## Peer-group pressure works on a very positive level...

In Port Washington to assume a high level of responsibility, guiding and inspiring them to make it all work.

Lingelbach continued his appraisal of the Meadows in this fashion:

"We often hear about the unfortunate aspects of peer group pressure these days, but in the Meadows' Teen Summer Theater peer group pressure works on a very positive level."

"No participant wants to be accused of letting down the others, and the results are a very high level of self-discipline and productions of exceptionally high quality."

For Pam and Ron Meadows, a standing ovation from Port Washington.

—Bill Neugebauer