

From garbage can law to smash amateur shows

By Amy Pett

She never saw a Broadway play until she was in high school. He was the "phantom programmer." Together, Pam and Ron Meadows have directed and produced some of the best amateur theatricals ever seen in Port Washington. Since 1972 they have done five musicals, all cast largely with children and teenagers, and will present "Guys and Dolls," their sixth production, this weekend at Schreiber High School.

The Meadows' productions suffer from none of the ills of many amateur efforts. The pace is fast and snappy as a Broadway hit and the actors and actresses do not stumble, muff their lines, or look silly. The Meadows are able to use the strength of their casts, rather than exposing the weaknesses of the young performers.

"Those are my values," Pam said this week just before a big rehearsal. "That's exactly how I think. Tonight they have to either do it and look good or I cut it out ... If somebody's tripping over their feet I'll say, OK, let's forget it."

And the splendid shows they produce are not those bland "written for children" plays. The Meadows have given Port Washington "Anything Goes," "Bye, Bye Birdie," and "Red, Hot, and Blue." In between those summer productions at the Sousa Band Shell, they have produced for the Play Troupe and Main Street School very adult versions of "Alice and Wonderland" and "Pinocchio."

The choreography is done by Pam, although she laughs to hear such a formal word applied to what she does when she designs dance numbers for her young performers. "I just kind of do what I was doing in front of the mirror when I was waiting to get hips," she said. She never studied dance. But her dancers really look like

they know what they're doing, swaying their hips, kicking their legs, and leaping around the stage like junior Rockettes.

Part of the secret to the Meadows' success appears to be Pam's methods at tryouts. She has the aspiring actors read Dr. Seuss books. She asks them, even if they are 17 years old, to sing "Jingle Bells" or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." She has them do pantomimes and, sometimes, when there are some racy lines in the play, asks them to read jokes from "Playboy." These simple but varied tasks help her see not only what they can do with familiar material, but how well they can take direction and improvise. It must work.

Another secret to their success, they claim, is that the kids ulti-

mately chosen to perform are so good. "The summer show is kind of like an all-star team," Pam said. "You get the best from Sousa and Weber and Schreiber and Buckley and Wheatley."

Pam and Ron got started in their current brand of show business fairly quietly. Pam had been in shows when she was at Schreiber High and Ron had done some plays in college. Pam worked with Tom and Carolyn Bridges on the Play Troupe's "Peter Pan" in the winter of 1972. One of the kids in the show, she said, complained that there was nothing like that to do in the summer. "She called me up for the rest of the winter," Pam said, and finally convinced her to do a show

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READY TO PERFORM in Teen Summer Theater production of "Guys and Dolls" are (l. to r.) Tim Nissen as Nathan Detroit, Debby Lewandowski as Adelaide, Mark Mastrocinque as Sky Masterson, and Mary Ellen Macina as Sarah Brown. Frank Loesser musical based on Damon Runyon's Broadway characters will be presented at 8:30 p.m. this Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday evenings in Schreiber High School auditorium. Tickets, available at door, are 50 cents each.