

## Couple enjoys unique roles in outdoor drama

By Mary Anne White

Raymond and Juliana Speakman have been busy preparing for the June 2026 opening of the Chillicothe outdoor drama *Tecumseh!*. The couple has a long history with the historical production, which premiered in 1973 at the then-newly-constructed 206-acre Sugarloaf Mountain Amphitheatre. The play, based on the life of the great Ohio Shawnee warrior of the American frontier and written by award-winning author Allan W. Eckert, is beginning its 53rd season.

A resident of Ross County for more than 60 years, Raymond has over 40 years association with the drama as an actor and is its head pyrotechnician. In the early 1990s, Juliana joined behind-the-scenes production as an Assistant Costumer, moved into the position of Head Costumer; and in 2015, she was recognized as the drama's Costume Designer. *Senior Times* reached out to the couple to learn more about their involvement with *Tecumseh!*

**What originally inspired your interest in *Tecumseh!* and what roles have you played?**

**Raymond:** "I saw the show when I was young, and several times afterward. I have always been interested in this time period—and more specifically the life of Simon Kenton."

Raymond's character portrayals include Tompkins (a bumbling comedic settler); Sikes (the embodiment of a greedy and ruthless anti-Native American settler, Sergeant (aka Sergeant Jebediah Whitlock)—a gruff frontier garrison soldier who also provides some comedic relief; and Simon Kenton (a woodsman, scout, and rugged frontiersman with a backstory as interesting as the Shawnee warrior). Simon Kenton is the character with whom Raymond most identifies, and his portrayal has been critiqued as being "more like Simon Kenton than Simon Kenton."

"I was not the first, nor am I the last to play Simon Kenton," says Raymond. "However, I feel that I am the one who has been most like the man himself. It is said that Simon was a tall,

red-headed man. What you have to understand, is that being 6 feet tall back in the late 1700's was tall. I am a student of the era, and my interests include black powder weapons, tomahawk throwing, hunting,

Juliana: "I worked at the outdoor drama *Blue Jacket* in 1989. While attending SETC (the South Eastern Theatre Conference) in 1990, I interviewed for an opening in the costume department here at

an Assistant Costumer. In 1995, I became the Head Costumer (basically, the costume shop manager). I stayed on through the 2001 season, after which I went back to school to earn my teaching degree and start



Raymond and Juliana Speakman have a long history with *Tecumseh!*



Raymond Speakman has portrayed several characters during his 40+ years with *Tecumseh!*

a family. Toward the end of the 2009 season, the current director asked me if I would return the following year. Around 2015, after realizing just about everything onstage was my design, I asked that my official title be changed to Costume Designer.

"I am NOT an actor. As an assistant costumer, I was required to perform in the ensemble for *Tecumseh!* but as soon as I became Head Costumer, I was able to devote my time to the drama in a purely technical manner."

**How many different costumes have you created?**

**Juliana:** "I'd say that I have designed and built 98% of the leather costumes that are on stage. In addition, any of the specialty beading in the show is my work. That includes any of the beaded belts, the beaded sash that *Tecumseh* wears during the Prisoner Exchange, and the leather "Shell Cape" that *Tecumseh's* sister *Tecumapese* wears during pivotal moments in the show. Additionally, any cloth costumes that have a Native design sewn onto them are my designs."

**What challenges do you have in creating costumes?**

**Juliana:** "With the exception of working with leather, I need a pattern as a guideline for making a costume. When I first See *TECUMSEH!*, page 7



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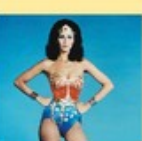
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