

'Happy Birthday, Wanda June' opens The Theatre

What started out as an unlikely dream in the minds of a few area actors has grown into a thriving reality in a few short months with promises of bigger and better things to come.

"We weren't sure about the idea at first," said Larry LaMarsh. "But it looks like it's taken hold now. I think we're on our way."

What LaMarsh, wife Laura, Harry McClane and a cast and crew of about 15 people are on their way to is the establishment of Sandy's first community theater group.

Going by the name of the "One Way Theater," the loosely knit but dedicated group of amateur actors has one successful show behind them with a second coming up in a week.

The children's play, "Beauty and the Beast," was the group's first production. It ran for 12 successful performances, mainly at area schools, and gave the players the incentive they needed to carry on.

"We had a fantastic response at the schools for 'Beauty and the Beast,'" said Laura LeMarsh, who along with husband, Larry, initiated the idea for the group.

The current project is "Happy Birthday, Wanda June," a comedy by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. better known for his best-selling novels than for the single work he wrote for stage.

The play will mark the grand opening of The Theater on Proctor Boulevard next Friday and Saturday, June 9 and 10. Two matinee performances are scheduled for June 17 and 24.

LaMarsh is cast as Harry in the lead, based on a caricature of Ernest Hemingway. His wife, Penelope, is played by Marlene Tebo.

McClane, who has been involved in 28 plays in amateur theater, is director for "Wanda June." His physical appearance on the set — with unlettered baseball cap turned backward and casual dress — would not likely be mistaken for a John Huston. But he appears to have drawn the cast of nine together for what could be a strong

show.

"I think we might be able to do something," McClane said. "We've had our ups and downs getting things together in the past few weeks, but it seems to be coming together now."

Director McClane points out that "Wanda June" does contain language that might be offensive to some. "Let's say it might be a 'PG' if it were a movie," he said.

The idea for the theater group in Sandy came out of an acting class taught by Larry and Laura LaMarsh at the Sandy Community School last winter. A second class with 13 people was held in early spring and produced "Beauty and the Beast."

From the core group of actors and technical people who worked on "Beauty," One Way Theater was formed.

LaMarsh and the rest of the players hope to draw in people from the area who have an interest in live theater.

"Our goal is to establish the group as a community theater with input from as many people as would like to join. We're not a bunch of professionals with pre-set ideas," LaMarsh added.

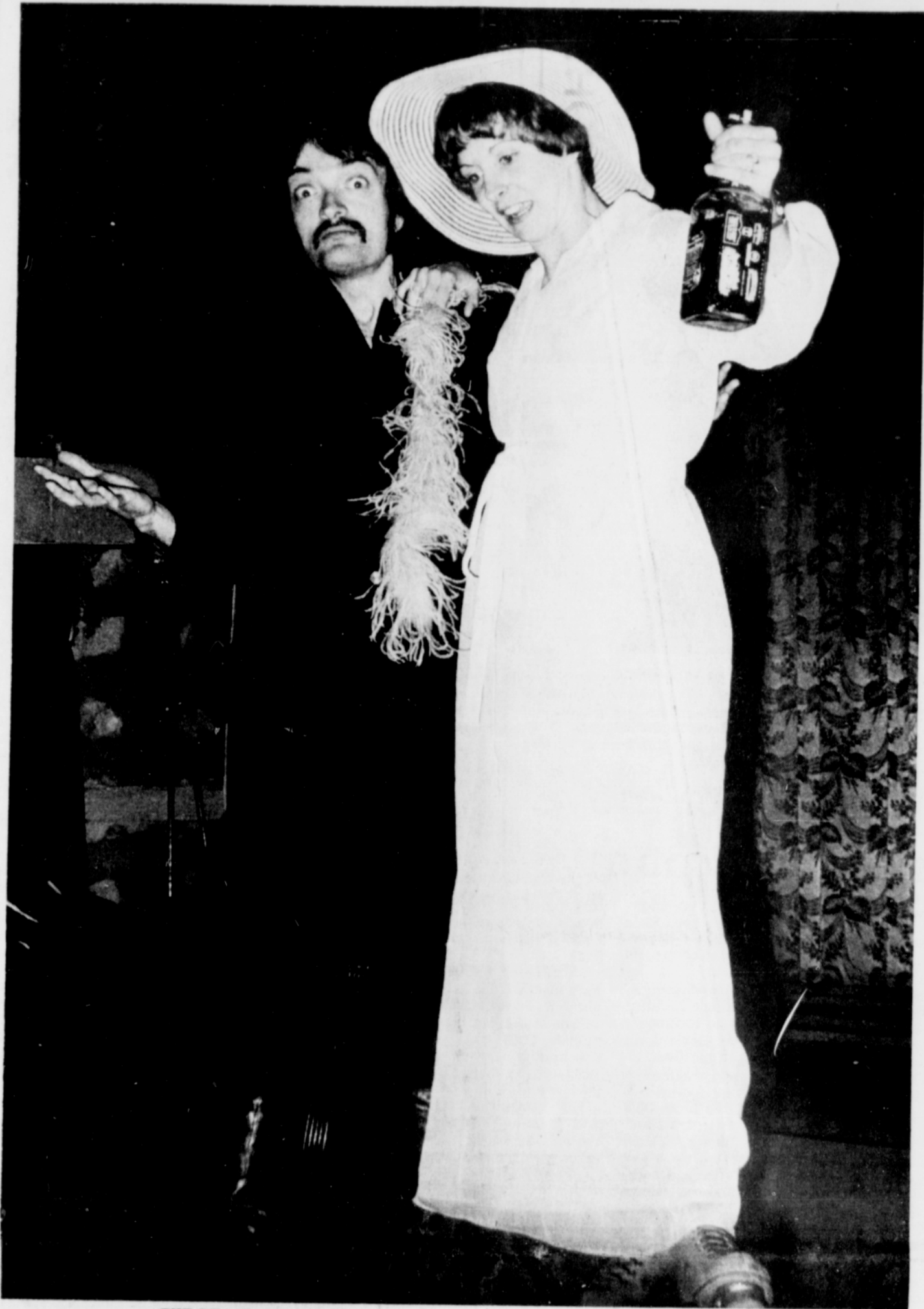
"If someone comes along and has an idea for a play, we'll sit down and talk about it and see if it can be worked out," he added. "We're not a closed group."

"We think there's a lot of talent in this area. I hope we can tap into it."

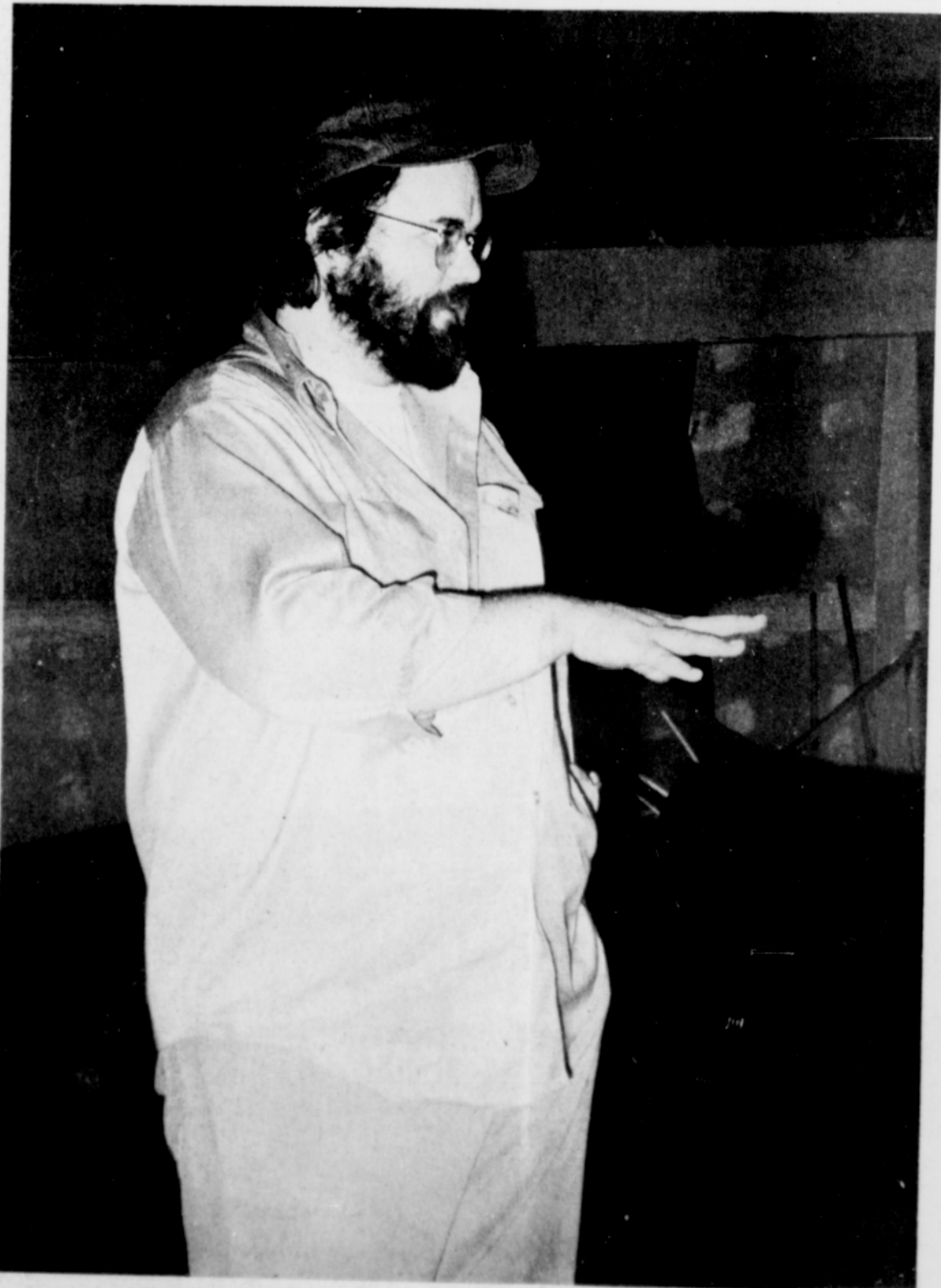
One Way Theater has found a home for its production in The Theater, as it is known. New owner John Kent is having the auditorium renovated and has opened his doors to the theater group. The arrangement appears to be working to the advantage of both.

A permanent stage has been built at the front of the theater. Kent has plans to feature a variety of live performances, possibly including the Portland Symphony Orchestra, as well as a regular run of new and old movies.

"We're all working for the same goal," LaMarsh said. "We're trying to bring good, live entertainment to Sandy."

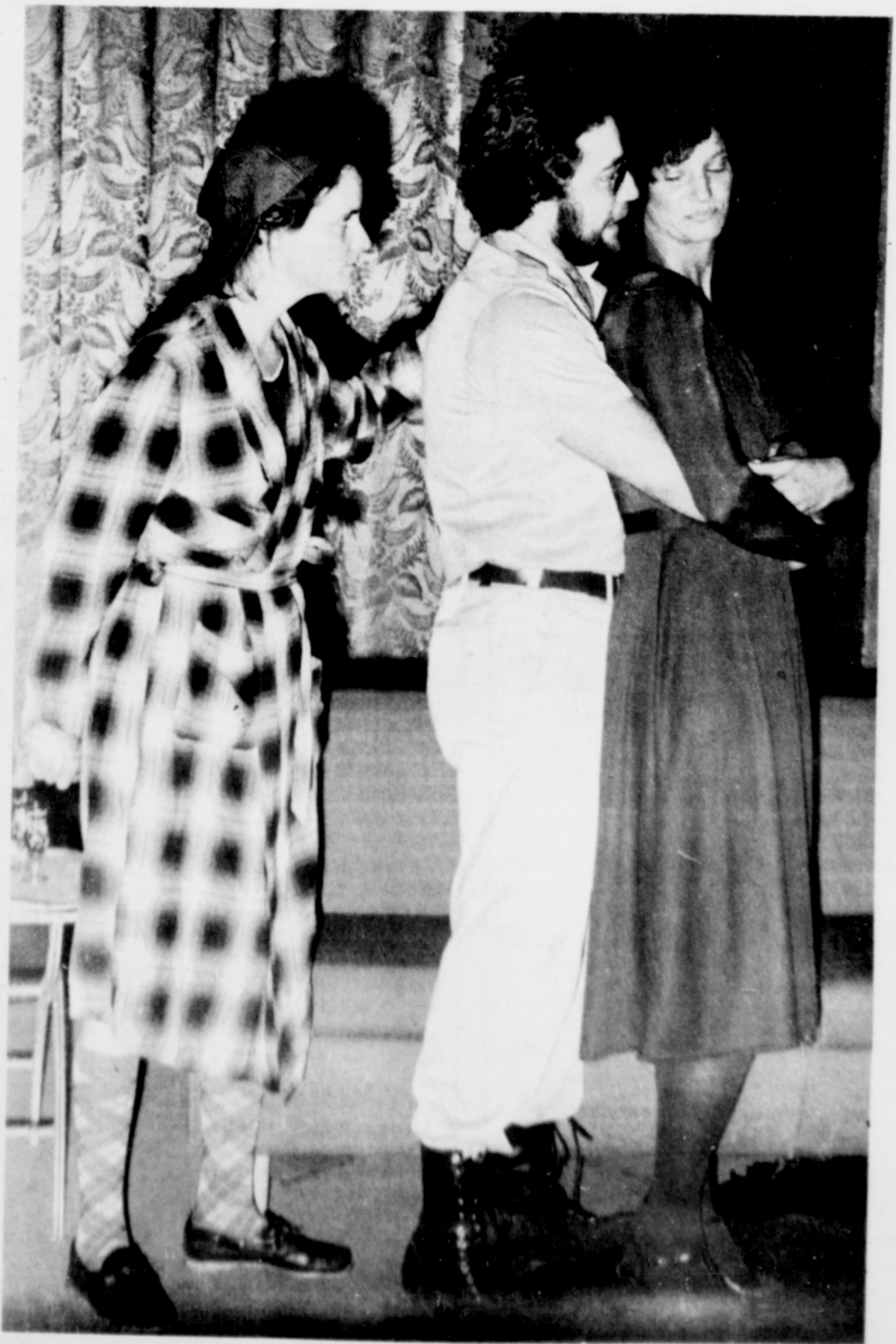


"THE BEAST of Yugoslavia" (left) and former wife of Harry, both now deceased, recount some of the lead character's personal flaws...



DIRECTOR HARRY McClane keeps the action flowing in a rehearsal...

Story/photos by John Kline



NOSY SON interrupts an intimate scene during rehearsal.