

DIVERSIONS

Community theatre survives and thrives

Theatres do the most with the least

BY ROGER VARLEY
Staff Writer

Whoever said "the show must go on" never had to deal with SARS.

Nancy Sheldrake and the Queensville Players had to contend with that problem just days before their production of Hello Dolly was scheduled to open at Keswick's Stephen Leacock Theatre in early April.

The show's leading lady was quarantined by the SARS outbreak, forcing the community theatre group to cancel the first week of shows.

Most community theatre groups do not use understudies to cover main roles.

For example, when a community theatre group in Uxbridge, just north of Whitechurch-Stouffville, lost its leading man in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* for one night a couple of years ago, the director had to play the role, reading from the script.

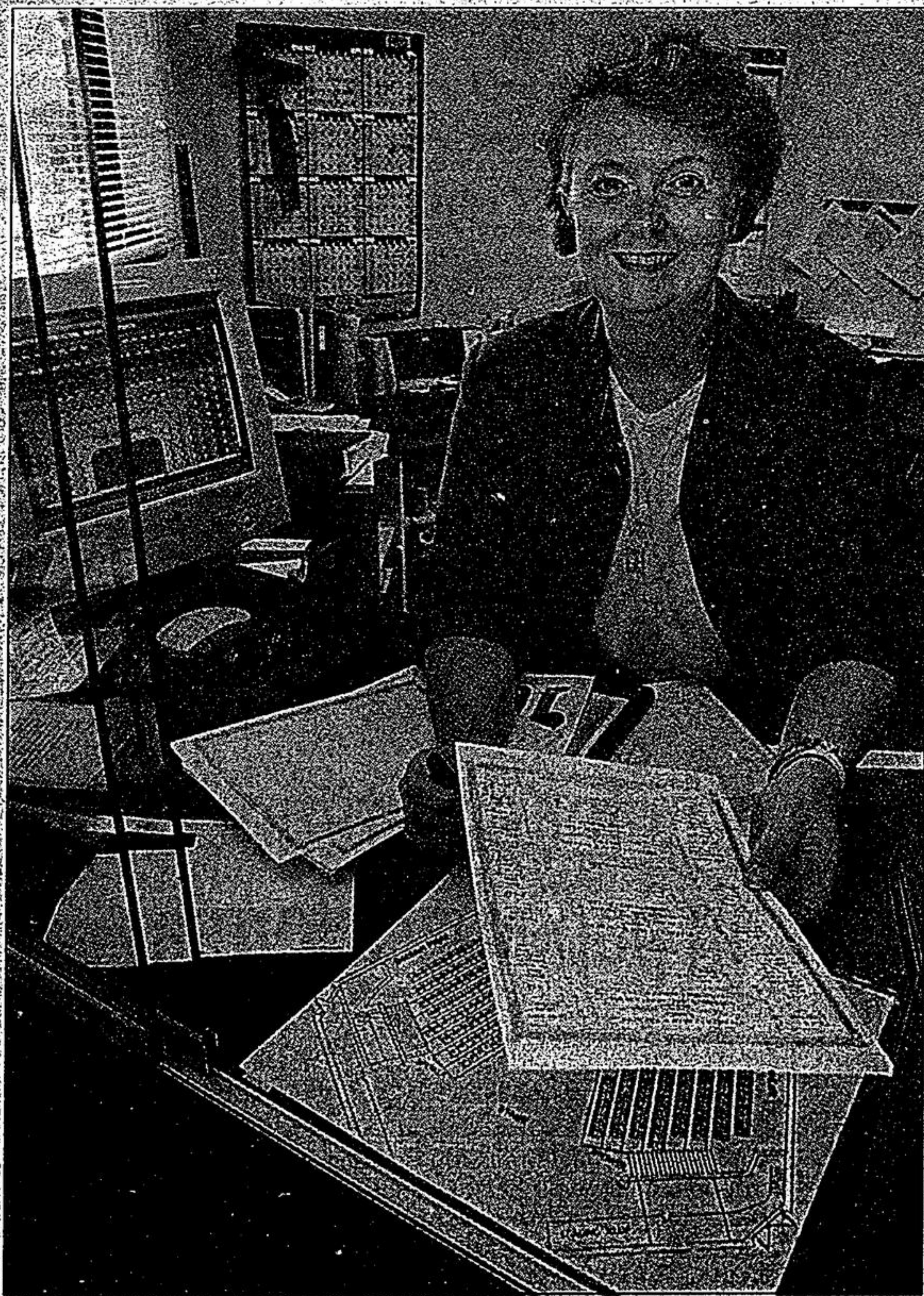
"I strongly believe you don't use understudies, because it's unfair to the players and the understudies," said Ms Sheldrake, president of the Queensville group. "We put extra shows on the following week, but we didn't cover our costs. It should have been a sell-out."

Losing money hurts. "We don't have much money in the bank," she said.

Such are the trials and tribulations of amateur theatre groups — at least, some of them.

Markham Little Theatre, on the other hand, is "very much alive and doing well," according to lifetime member John Storey.

A member of Markham Little Theatre for 35 of its 37 years and a former president of Theatre



STAFF PHOTOS/SJOERD WITTEVEN

Ontario, Mr. Storey said the group has saved up more than \$30,000 over the years and recently was given property on the Markham museum grounds to build a rehearsal hall and workshop.

The move is expected to save the group money, since Markham Little Theatre now spends about

\$14,000 a year on rental space.

Mr. Storey said it helps that such town notables as Mayor Don Cousens, Regional Councillor Gord Landon and York District School Board chairperson Bill Crothers are strong supporters and companies such as Emerson Electric and Steelcase are treas-

ured donors.

It also helps that the 500-seat Markham Theatre, the group's home, was built and designed for local amateur groups, even though professional shows come into the theatre on a regular basis.

Nancy Sheldrake and the Queensville Players had to contend with SARS just days before their production of Hello Dolly was scheduled to open at Keswick's Stephen Leacock Theatre in early April. The show's leading lady was quarantined, forcing the community theatre group to cancel the first week of shows. Extra shows the following week didn't cover costs.

Novel ideal for lazy days of summer

Book review

Novel: All Hat (308 pages, \$32 hardcover)

Author: Brad Smith

Publisher: Penguin Books

Ray Dokes gets out of prison and moves back to his small Ontario town. Almost everyone seems happy to see him.

It might have something to do with the fact he was incarcerated for beating up Sonny Stanton, an over-privileged thug known for breeding horses, blowing money while abusing alcohol, his employees and women.

Sonny has been buying up farmland in town, leaving residents worried about a suburban invasion of their rural community.

But disaster strikes Sonny when his two none-too-bright lackeys make off with his prize racehorse, opening the door to a caper that, quite frankly, strains all credibility.

All Hat is not going to win any points for originality. Award-winning Canadian author Brad Smith has taken a dollop of Dick Francis, a spoonful of Elmore Leonard and pinches and smidges of various crime writers, then Canadianized it by setting the action on the dark side of the Niagara Peninsula.

Like a high-stakes gambler, Mr. Smith holds back some of his cards, saving a few key details of the back story until late in the book. That, and the abundant humour help mitigate a main plot that is preposterous, to say the least.

The best aspect of the book is the finely drawn characters, particularly Dean and Paulie, the horse-swiping flunkies.

Dean, a farmhand who wears knock-off Armani suits to work and spends most of his day drinking in the local nudie bar and complaining about his lot in life, is the source of the title.

The old Texas cowhand who takes Ray into his home refers to Dean as "all hat and no cattle."

Even more entertaining is Paulie, who is believed by all around him to be

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