

The Nebraskan

Friday, August 2, 1985

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Vol. 84 No. 172

Weather: Mostly cloudy today with partial clearing this afternoon. Slightly warmer and breezy with a high of 78 (25C). Partly cloudy tonight with a slight chance of nighttime thunderstorms and a low of 67 (19C). Expect warmer conditions for the weekend. Partly cloudy skies will prevail with a 30 percent chance of precipitation. Highs near 88 (31C), lows near 68 (20C).
Barb Branda/The Nebraskan

Stun guns raise controversy...Page 2

Divers fight weather in JO meet...Page 6

Riverboats add to Brownville history

By Lise Olsen
Senior Reporter

"Cruising down the river, on a Sunday afternoon, with one you love, the sun above, waiting for the moon," — "Cruising Down the River (On a Sunday Afternoon)."

When this sentimental, somewhat sappy song was published, boat traffic on the Missouri and other rivers was still thriving.

Steamboats like the Meriwether Lewis cruised the Missouri near Brownville, Nebraska, 90 miles southeast of Lincoln.

There were few river bridges. At Brownville, boats ferried people across the river.

One early ferry, "Ada, Queen of the West," was sunk while carrying a load of wild horses; the horses ran to one side of the boat and toppled it.

Today, the Meriwether Lewis is a State Historical Society museum in Brownville State Park.

Barge traffic has been slowed by agriculture and the depression. Now only one or two tubboats are sighted each week.

The only remnants of the last ferry to operate at Brownville are her wheel, and her name: "The Spirit of Brownville."

The wheel is in the boat memorabilia collection of Randel and Jane Smith. The Smith's also own and operate the old ferry's namesake the new "Spirit of Brownville" and her sister ship "The Brownville Belle," also named for an old ferryboat.

The Smith's riverboats are the only two on the Missouri, except for those in Kansas City, Jane said.

Randel, who also founded the Brownville Village Theatre, said he'd hoped starting a passenger riverboat ride would enhance Brownville's reputation as a historical town.

When the Smiths built the 150-passenger "Spirit of 1981," they moved the "Brownville Belle" to Bellevue.

"The Spirit" was designed by artist Paul Merton and constructed to resemble the early paddleboats. The paddles are mostly for show, Randel said. The boat is really powered by stainless steel propellers under the boat. The propellers are operated by the boat's 230-horse power engine. The boat travels five miles per hour upstream and 12 miles per hour downstream. It gets about .5 miles to the gallon, "four gallons to the mile," Randel said.

Six-hundred to 1,000 passengers ride the "Brownville Spirit," each week. Once aboard, they typically listen to the piano player, eat on vinyl-covered tables, dance or just watch the river. In Bellevue, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, the "Belle" carries 1,500-2,000 customers each weekend. The boats are available for charter cruises in April and October.

Groups can charter the boats in April and October for a minimum of \$300-1,000. About 20 UNL groups charter the boats each season, Jane said.

In the 15 years the Smiths have been piloting their boats, they've never had a "man overboard," or a serious accident.

Jane, Randel and their 19-year-old son Jamie have approved pilots licenses issued by the Coast Guard, Jane said.



A smiling passenger looks over the side of the "Spirit of Brownville."

Mark Davis/The Nebraskan

Hectic activity fills actors' summer

By Lise Olsen
Senior Reporter

Almost every day since May 31, 15 actors and technicians, mostly from Nebraska Wesleyan University have been building sets, rehearsing, learning lines and sweating 20 hours a day.

Constant activity and very little sleep is a way of life at Brownville Village Theatre, company members said in a Wednesday evening interview after their performance, "June Groom."

1985 marks the 19th season of repertory theater in Brownville, 90 miles southeast of Lincoln.

Brownville Village Theatre is the oldest repertory theater in Nebraska, Director Henry H. Blanke said.

When Blanke arrived in Brownville for his first season, the 150-seat theater building, an old Christian church, was a shell. The basement was muddy and bugs and birds lived inside.

"I wasn't encouraged," Blanke said.

This year the company is presenting four plays in repertory (rotation) June 29 through August 18.

Top: From left, "Marty Lafarge (Dan Season) confronts cast members Annette L. Blanke, and Kristin L. Dolberg in an on-stage struggle.

Bottom: From left, Sid Strong shows her disgust as Frank Watson and Kevin Phillips look on in the Brownville Village Theatre production of "June Groom."

This year's plays are "Hobson's Choice" (Aug. 4, 11, 17) "Everybody Loves Opal" (Aug. 3, 10, 18) "The Odd Couple" (Aug. 8, 10, 15, 18) and "June Groom" (Aug. 3, 4, 9, 11, 16, 17).

Most of the plays were rehearsed and blocked in a week, cast member, Tracy Armagost said. During that same week the company prepares props, constructs scenery and makes costumes.

"You do in one week what we'd do at Wesleyan in six weeks," cast member Linda Mall said.

Blanke selects the Brownville company in March. Then he selects plays that he thinks fit the cast members acting and technical abilities, Blanke said. In the 19 years Blanke has directed there have been 83 different plays and 877 performances at Brownville.

The actor/technicians in the company are paid \$500 for a season of work, with \$100 bonuses for returning members.

The real rewards are the experience and the audience's appreciation, cast members said.

Joe Moser, another company member, said he's enjoyed the fast-paced theater at Brownville. But he'll also be happy to go home when summer's over.

"(I'll) cherish things like being able to take a nap...watching TV for more than ten minutes, and go out with friends to paint the town red white and blue," he said.



Mark Davis/The Nebraskan



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