

Time Machine Takes Students to Greek Battle

By Christina Floan
A Member of the Staff

A "time machine" is transporting Maple Woods Community College students back into history.

Travelers in the device can spend a few minutes with a Cro-Magnon man, Catullus, a first century Roman poet, or a pair of Greek Athenian lovers during the Peloponnesian war. Yet they never leave the basement of the college theater.

The time machine actually is a sophisticated 3-dimensional movie, complete with sounds and smells that enhance the viewers sense of reality, said John Stockmyer, the Maple Woods instructor who helped invent the device.

"The machine is a motivator for students in my Western Experience I class," he explained. "You make an A on an exam for me and get a time machine ticket."

The historical trip, authentic in detail, reinforces what students have learned on the exam by taking them back to the period that they just studied, he added.

Travelers are outfitted in white laboratory coats, and seated in a bathysphere-shaped capsule equipped with headphones, a breathing mask and even an enormous hood ornament called a psychic translator that is supposed to convert ancient European thoughts to English.

After a taped explanation of time travel principles by Stockmyer, the machine is turned on and colored waves of light appear through viewing tubes on either side of the capsule.

The scene shifts and characters which appear to be right outside the capsule appear to discuss current events and personal affairs. The real-life effect is created by projecting twin scenes from projectors behind the capsule onto screens set at specific angles to the viewing holes, Stockmyer said.

The characters, played by college students and faculty, appear to come into the capsule in the Peloponnesian sequence, he said. "The characters walk right toward you and, if you cover one of the tubes, walk into the blackness beside you," Stockmyer explained. "They disappear in the darkness but you continue to hear them."

The machine's operator filters odors through the breathing mask at appropriate moments to help set the mood, Stockmyer said. Perfume is used for



John Stockmyer checks machine

example in a scene in the Roman passage in which a slave girl massages her master's shoulders.

Background sounds also are used in sequences such as one where a Cro-Magnon man is eaten by wolves.

"I taped the sounds from the movie, 'The Viking,' in which a man is thrown to the wolves," Stockmyer said. "In our case, though, an administrator played the part. I always say when in doubt, throw an administrator to the wolves," he joked.

The next sequence, now being researched, is a reproduction of the 1883 Krakatoa volcanic eruptions in which an Indonesian island was destroyed.

"It will look like the time capsule has landed in the ocean just before the volcano explodes. And after the eruption, a giant tidal wave comes at you. We pluck you out of the ocean just in time to save you," Stockmyer said.

The scenes will be filmed in his 4-year-old son's clear plastic wading pool with a miniature volcano placed in it, the instructor explained.

Stockmyer, who owns an educational materials service that produces historical records, games and other

help of Ronald Brink, the Maple Woods director of theater, and history and theater students.

The time machine is not meant to teach, although it could probably be adapted for classroom use, Stockmyer said.

"The thing is supposed to do two things—motivate the students to do well and encourage students who have to take history to study," he explained. Some of the 70 persons who have taken the 10-minute time trips won their tickets by making marked improvement in their work.

"The theory is that the student gets into history and gets involved in it and doesn't need rewards any more to keep going," Stockmyer said.

Reaction from both students and college staff has been good, he noted.

"I'm even getting feedback from the friends of those people saying they heard it was really fun," Stockmyer said.

The project also gives student actors and technicians a chance to work in a new medium and learn about environmental theater, Brink said.

"The time machine deals with al-

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most all the senses—sight, sound, smell and even movement," he said. "If it works, and I think it does, we can really bend someone's mind and actually make them think they're going back in time."

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