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David A. Sargent
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Franco-American play premieres Friday

BY DAVID A. SARGENT

Special to the Sun Journal

LEWISTON — A new play about a family's struggles to reconnect with their Franco-American roots will premiere here Friday, with an educational element for about 30 Lewiston Middle School students.

WHAT: "A Frog Stuck in the Ice"

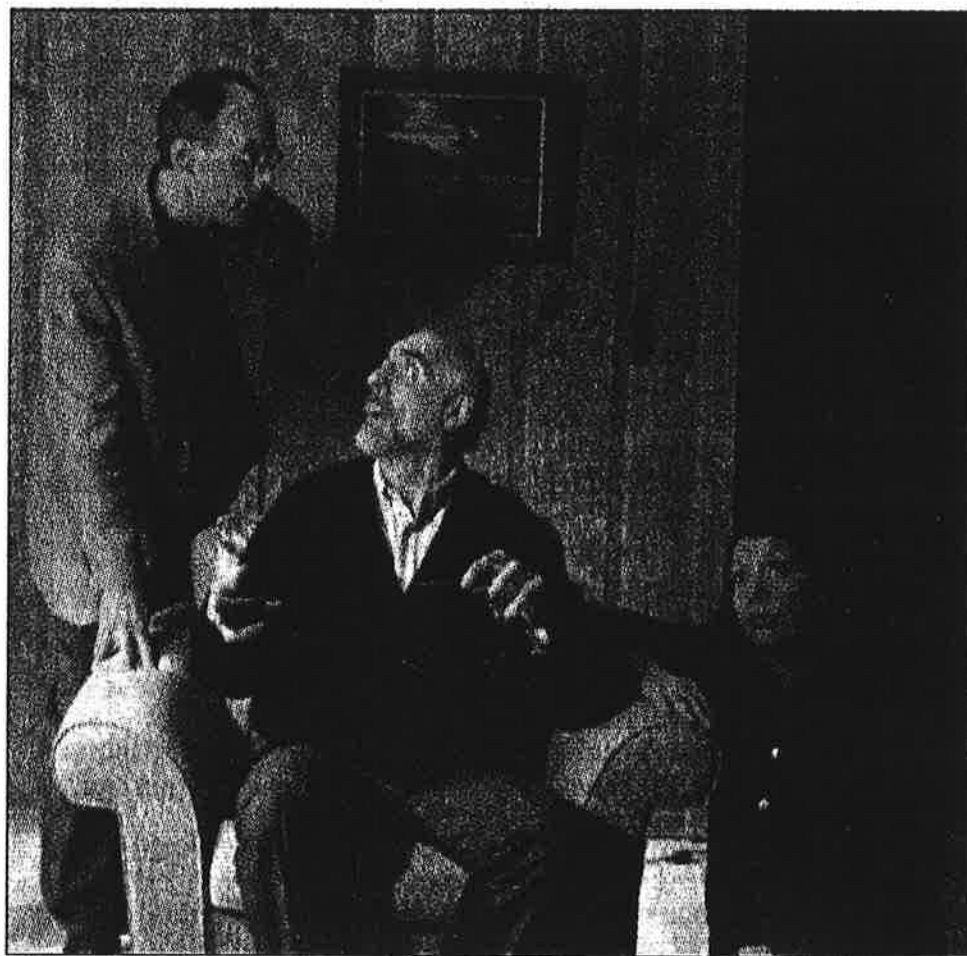
WHEN: 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 5

WHERE: Lewiston Middle School auditorium

"A Frog Stuck in the Ice: A Franco-American Story" is based on the cultural heritage of the Franco population of Lewiston-Auburn. The play was commissioned by L/A Arts and created by three Maine artists. It represents the third phase of the L/A Arts Cultural Heritage Chronicles program.

A team of Lewiston Middle School students participated in the process of creating this piece of the-

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REHEARSING: A play about a family struggling to reconnect with its Franco-American roots is premiering locally Friday. Taking part in the production are, from left, Gordon Carlisle, Michael Parent and Susan Poulin.

Play

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ater by working with the show's creative artists. They are storyteller, writer and actor Michael Parent, a Lewiston native; the "Poolyes," writer and performer Susan Poulin and visual artist, songwriter, writer and actor Gordon Carlisle; and director David Kaye.

Diane Bleakney, an eighth-grade English teacher at Lewiston Middle School, said she and Christine Cook, who also teaches eighth-grade English, have been working with two classes on the project since October. The students will videotape Friday's performance and develop a film about the total creative process.

The play

The plot of "A Frog Stuck in the Ice" centers on a woman interested in reconnecting with her Franco-American cultural roots. Her aging father is resistant to her sudden inquiries into a heritage that she had hitherto ignored as he grieves the one-year anniversary of the death of his wife.

As the play progresses, a range of emotions are explored as father, daughter and son-in-law deal with their relationships with one another. They eventually see each other in a different light. The play examines universal issues that are especially relevant to the Franco-American community of the Twin Cities area.

Bleakney said the middle school students made oral tapes and created a film called "Lewiston: A City We Call Home" in earlier phases of the Cultural Heritage Chronicles program. The work is made possible by a grant from L.L. Bean aimed at integrating video and technology into the curriculum.

L/A Arts Executive Director Richard Willing asked Bleakney and her students to be involved in the project, she said.

"The artists have come to the

school four times to work with the students. In October, Parent discussed the writing process and then in November he returned and read from his script."

The students critiqued the work-in-progress and "he actually changed some of the lines as a result of their suggestions," Bleakney said.

In December, the students were involved in a rehearsal. Parent will be back later this month to hear their reactions and reviews of the show.

Poulin, Carlisle and Kaye also attended sessions at the school to work with the students.

"A Frog Stuck in the Ice" runs for one performance only at 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 5, at Lewiston Middle School auditorium.

The show contains strong language and is recommended for children in fifth grade and up.

The artists

Michael Parent has performed traditional and original stories, in both English and French, in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and beyond, since 1977. He is a 1999 recipient of the National Storytelling Network's Circle of Excellence Award.

Susan Poulin and Gordon Carlisle have been collaborating on plays, songs and artwork for a decade.

Poulin, a Maine native, was voted the 1996 Contemporary Story Champion at the First Annual Yankee Yarns Contest in Keene, N.H. Carlisle has been actively involved as a visual artist, songwriter, writer and actor on the New Hampshire Seacoast and in southern Maine for more than 15 years.

Kaye has worked as an actor, director and designer for companies throughout the country. He is a member of the faculty of the University of New Hampshire Department of Theatre and Dance.