

## Crime at the Castle Murder/Mystery Dinner

by Gloria Sullivan



*Amy Nesheim played the ghost of Searles Castle.*

The Windham Endowment for Community Action presented a murder mystery dinner theatre production last Friday night at Searles Castle. Local author Anne Kelsey wrote this unique murder mystery for the occasion, and the cast of characters included local business owners, students, and politicians.

Guests were treated to a complimentary limousine valet up the long and winding driveway leading up to the castle that looked rather ominous on this particular night. Cocktails and appetizers were served beside a giant event tent during cocktail hour, as people filled the castle's courtyard dressed in their evening finery.

Director Donna Tongue mingled with the crowd and made sure all of her actors had arrived for the night's performance.

"I am very excited. We have been rehearsing since mid August. All but two of our actors are from Windham. Everyone has worked really hard and it has been a lot of fun," she said.

Stacey Bruzzese, chairman of the committee that organized the event, was excited that some of the night's events were kept a secret, even from the organizers.

"It will be a lot of fun," Bruzzese commented.

The "whodunit" seemed more like a political satire of the Windham High School dedication ceremony. Kevin Waterhouse, a seasoned Windham actor who participates in many community theater productions, who portrayed the character Don Developer, said, "This is the first of what we hope is an annual tradition. What we want to do each year is give the Windham Achievement Award to any group that's responsible for improving the culture in the community." This year the Windham Community Band would be the recipient of this award, and a flute ensemble would be performing for the audience as they dined on a four-course dinner. A very confident Waterhouse greeted the crowd and encouraged everyone to purchase raffle tickets for various gifts that were donated by local businesses. He informed the crowd that they would be split into groups and take tours of the castle in order to assist in solving the crime that would soon take place.

"If you're from Windham, and you take a look at who is inside the tent, you've got people from all different groups in town, and that represents the endowment because the endowment wants to be all good things in Windham. We hope to be the umbrella that brings everybody together," said committee president Melinda Davis.

The players were introduced by Don Developer. Anthony DiFruscia, state representative, who played Larry Laptop, portrayed as the likeable geek, joked that 842 laptops were purchased for a mere 330 students at Windham High School.

"That's three laptops per student!" he exclaimed.

Introduced next, character Wanda Woo Hoo, played by a quirky and enthusiastic Jessi Nappo-Mead, played the head of the cheerleading committee whose group was responsible for all the fundraising for the high school.

"With all the money we got, we have plans to build a rooftop pool!" she exclaimed. She told the crowd some of her many interests, which included making homemade jams and jellies.

Suzie Selectman, played by Kristin Waterhouse, wondered why there was such a fuss over wetlands surrounding the site of the new school. In her best Southern drawl, she said, "Wetlands are called swamps in the South!"

The actors raised their glasses for a toast to the new high school, and Don Developer, appearing to have been poisoned, dropped to the floor, and the mystery began. The cast took turns listing why each of their counterparts may be guilty of murdering Don Developer. The audience was led to the dining room of the castle by Officer Move-it-Along, played by Joel Sadler. The guests were to participate in some civilian sleuthing. They witnessed a horticulturist, played by Celina Wilt, describe the elements found in the centerpiece of the dining table. She explained how it had some greenery and choke cherry berries that could be poisonous if ingested.

The crowd was startled by a scream coming from the grand hall of the castle, where a startled woman, played by Sophia Djuricic, claimed to have seen a ghost-like face in the fireplace. The lights suddenly went out and the ghost of Searles castle appeared from a balcony above. The ghost, played by Amy Nesheim, provided clues as she eerily appeared to be floating in a breeze from above.

Next, the group was ushered off to the grassy area below a turret. A comedic exchange ensued between Larry Laptop and the 210-year-old ghost of the farmer who owned the land in which the London Bridge was originally on. The crowd joined the conversation as one guest asked, "Is it (pronounced) "Wind-ham" or "Wind-um"?" Everyone laughed and the ghost of yester-year replied, "It's Wind-ham!" Many onlookers cheered in response to this debate of opposing viewpoints. The ghost requested an apology for moving his man-made bridge and supplied some clues from his perch above the crowd once Larry Laptop offered to offer students a history course to inform them about the historical treasure.

After the clues were presented, the biggest clue pointing to a 'female Windham leader', the civilians were encouraged to ask the cast questions as they mingled throughout the event tent. An enthusiastic novice detective and Pelham resident, Sharon Atwood, asked questions and took notes. Wendy Woo Hoo's answer to Atwood's question was no help as she replied, "The only thing that I know is that I'm pretty!" Woo Hoo claimed that somebody was calling her from across the room and darted off.

The cast took the stage one final time to review clues and motives. Don Developer was deemed to be poisoned by choke cherries, and since Wendy Woo Hoo made jellies of this sort, all fingers pointed to her. She was arrested by Officer Move-it-Along, and the mystery was solved.

As the production came to a close, the audience rose to their feet for an ovation and waiters began filing in with platters to begin dinner service.

"This was a really great fundraiser. The atmosphere was maximum for this kind of event. It was a great way to bring the community together. This community, together with the new economic planner, is really making a difference," said Sharon Atwood.



*Anthony DiFruscia, Joel Sadler, Kristin Waterhouse, Jessi Nappo-Mead, Kevin Waterhouse*



*The sold-out production was held in a large event tent.*



*The ghost of the Windham farmer who built the London Bridge is angry over the bridge being moved.*