

Top-flight drama specialist fulfills granny's expectations

By JOHN STEWART
Staff Writer

When Fred Diehl was a young man, his grandmother once told him he was a very versatile young man. "It will be a curse," she warned, "but you'll always eat."

Diehl (pronounced Dee-L) has indeed eaten well, but in looking back on his wide-ranging career in broadcasting in Canada, he's not so sure his versatility has been a curse.

The writer, actor, producer, director, administrator, technician, et al., was recently honored with an ACTRA award for the best radio program of 1983. Diehl won for his production of *The Panther and the Jaguar*, a riveting radio drama which kicked off the introduction of drama on CBC radio's *Morningside* show.

Writer Linda Zwicker had the idea of dramatizing the love affair between British authors H.G. Wells and Rebecca West. While the Wells estate agreed to the notion, there was a two-year delay in getting co-operation from West.

On the day West died, Diehl called Zwicker to tell her to go ahead with the fictional account of the romance, which was loosely based on the couple's letters.

The response to the love story, set against the glittering literary world of Wells and West, was overwhelming. Prime-time radio drama was a hit. Diehl has since produced 70 per cent of all the dramas which have run on *Morningside*.

The real yardstick of the quality of the *Morningside* work is the fact that Diehl's shows garnered an incredible eight national nominations in the preliminary rounds of the ACTRA competition.

Diehl has come a long way from his first radio days at CKVA in Edmonton where he got a job after leaving the service in

Very
interesting
person



FRED DIEHL

1945. He was a one-man crew at the station, doing a morning show, producing a comedy half-hour, school dramas, and finding time to produce shows for the CBC.

One of those shows featured a fiddler named Ameer Granam, who would later become known as "King" Ganam on *Holiday Ranch* — which Diehl would write — and *Country Hoedown*.

Diehl has done everything from being a color commentator at the Calgary

Stampede to starting the first adult television early-morning current affairs show in Canada on Hamilton's CHCH TV in 1962. The ratings were higher than the *Today Show's*, but no one wanted to advertise.

Acting has always been a sideline for Diehl. He starred in Arthur Hailey's *Flight into Danger* on the CBC in 1954. Although he claims his acting career "never went anywhere," he was also in the pilot of the CBC series *Wojeck*, made a little-seen movie out west with Bruce Dern and Gordon Lightfoot called *Harry Tracey*, and was most recently seen on CBC TV in the highly successful *Chautauqua Girl*.

Sports has also been more than a passing interest with the Port Credit resident. He was executive producer of the Canada Games in Vancouver in 1973 and spent three years before and during the Montreal Olympics acting as the head of hosting services for broadcasters around the world.

A seven-year resident of Mississauga, Diehl will be 63 this fall. His wife Nan, who has co-authored a number of scripts with her husband, is purchasing secretary at Port Credit Secondary School.

The broadcasting business is now highly specialized. Diehl commiserates with the young people entering the business now. "They'll never have the opportunities I did," he says.

He started out as his own technician, making sound effects on his own shows. He will probably end his "official" career as one of Canada's top-flight drama specialists.

His grandmother wouldn't be surprised to know that in between there has been a potpourri of surprises.