

STEVE BEAMER / Staff photographer

Ken (Mike O'Brien) gets a warm embrace from Jed Jenkins (Tim Estep) during a dress rehearsal for "The Fifth of July," to be performed at the Doudna Fine Arts Center Playroom Feb. 19-24. Tickets are \$2

for Eastern students, \$3 for senior citizens and children and \$4 for all others.

'Fifth of July' will have its own fireworks

By BRIAN BRUEGGEMANN
Staff writer

Although fireworks are usually only associated with the Fourth of July, director Terry Allen hopes the "Fifth of July" will have some fireworks of its own.

Allen is directing the Eastern Illinois University Theater's production of "Fifth of July," which runs Friday through Wednesday.

The curtain will rise in the Doudna Fine Arts Center Playroom at 8 p.m. each night except Sunday, when there will be a 2 p.m. matinee.

Lanford Wilson originally wrote the play in 1977, but revised it in 1980 when it was shown on Broadway.

Alternately comical and emotionally compelling "Fifth of July" deals with a legless Vietnam veteran, Ken, and his old friends from college, all of whom were activists in the 60's.

The action centers on his friend, Gwen's, offer to buy Ken's farmhouse in rural Missouri. Gwen, who's no stranger to drugs and alcohol, is an aspiring rock star and wants to turn the farm into a recording

studio.

"It's most interesting probably because of the characters," Allen said. "There are some plays that are more heavily plotted as far as a strong, narrative story goes, but this play deals more with revealing who these people are."

"Each of (the characters) has been affected pretty much by that 1960's and early 70's Vietnam era. There are several questions raised as to what they're going to do next with their lives, and how they are going to deal with some bitter memories and put them into perspective,"

Allen said.

In that sense, Allen said, the play is reminiscent of "The Big Chill," although "Fifth of July" was written first.

Ken is played by senior Mike O'Brien and Gwen is played by senior Jill Taylor. Rounding out the rest of the company are seniors Allison Eudeikis, Anne Lloyd, Patrick Clayberg and Eileen Sullivan and freshman Robert Poe.

The lead character and Vietnam veteran, Ken, lost his legs just below the waist and wears
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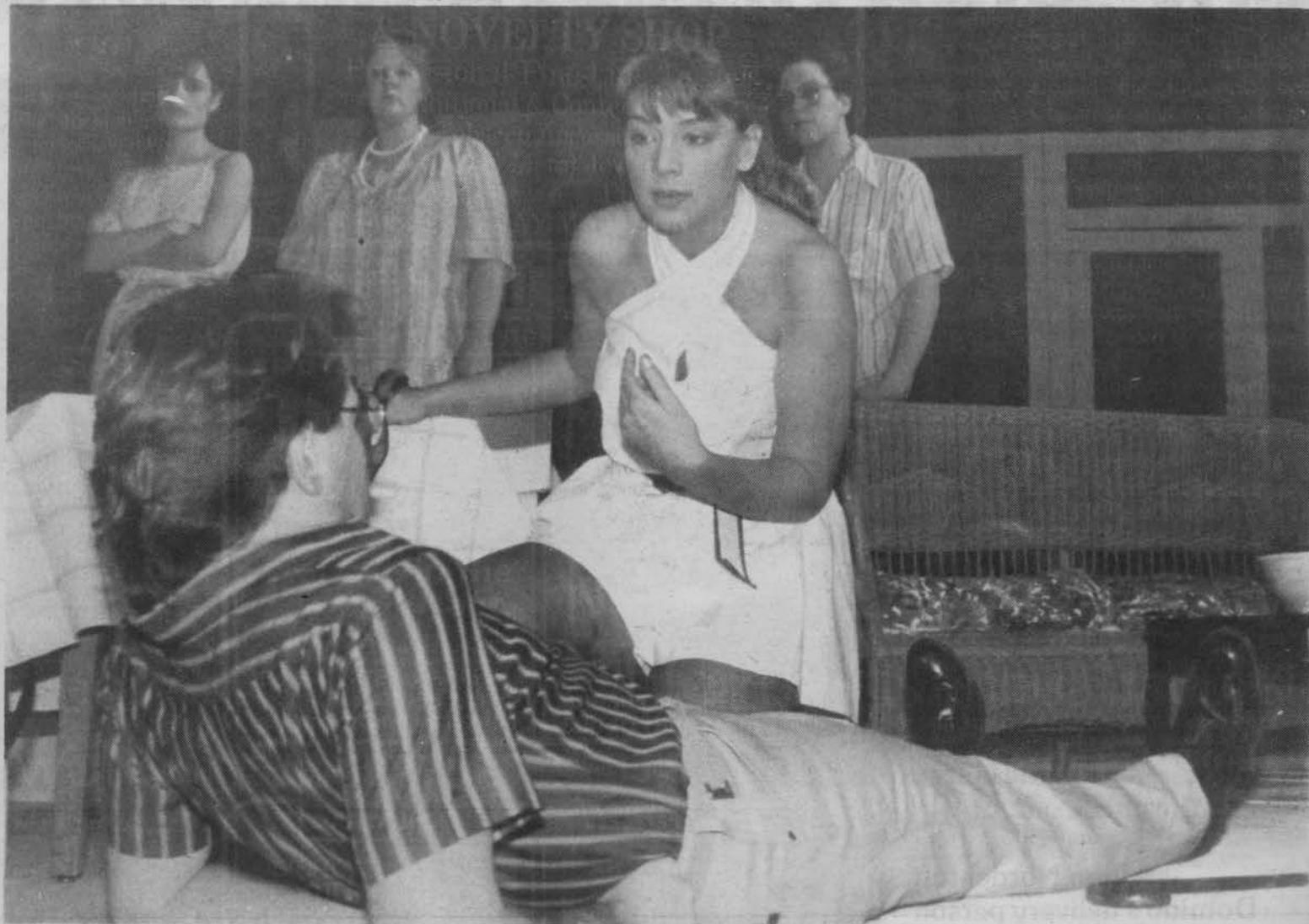
prostheses. Allen said O'Brien began practicing with crutches (the type with metal braces around the forearms) before Christmas, and even used them in public to test his acting skill.

"He went to a bar that had a long staircase going up to the entrance. He ended up kind of clogging the system and there was a long line behind him, but everybody was very patient with him. It was very interesting how he was treated by other people," Allen said.

Although portraying a character with a disability creates a physical challenge for O'Brien, the biggest challenge the cast will face is acting in the intimacy of the 110-seat Playroom instead of the 300-plus-seat University Theater.

"The audience is very close to you, and they can see everything, including your eye movement. If you're that close, one thing you hope is not going to happen is that you get caught acting," Allen explained.

"People shouldn't see the actors going through the motions," he continued. "It should look more effortless and easy than it really is. It's like watching figure skaters in the Olympics—the audience shouldn't see the technique underneath it. But I think the actors like performing close to the audience."



Gwen (Jill Taylor) pleads with Ken, a legless Vietnam veteran, during a dress rehearsal for "The Fifth of July." The play deals with

STEVE BEAMER Staff photographer
a Vietnam vet, his friends and how they were influenced by the '60s and '70s. The play is directed by Terry Allen.