Some Find Puppets an Alternative to 6.270

By Deena Dershow

While many students spent Independence Day Vacation slaving away in a laboratory or furiously studying for the fall term's assignments, four students spent their Independent Activities Period creating life-size works of art and imagination. The students, enrolled in puppet design, develed plans and built four puppets which were as large as their creators.

The idea for the project originally came from Marshall D. Hughes, incoming Senior Program Senior Staff Assistant and Director of Opera Un Met, a Boston-based music company.

"What I want to do is use the puppets to tell the story of The Magic Flute," Hughes said. "I've always liked to do things for the school-age kids and preschoolers."

The Magic Flute will be produced as a children's opera, Hughes said. "I want to use two or three real-life singers in Mozart's The Magic Flute," Hughes said. Singers from Opera Un Met will be used for the solos, but Hughes has considered using two or three MIT students for smaller singing and narrating roles.

These characters will walk around on stage and move the puppets when the parts they say require the puppets to do something, explained Raluca G. Barbulescu '96, project coordinator.

The first performance will be held at the MIT Child Care Center. Other performances will tentatively be held in the Brookline and Brighton public schools. "I'd like to take it into the public schools in Boston," Hughes added.

Hughes asks for student help.

Barbulescu originally heard about puppet design from Hughes, who explained the project in his IAP class and asked for workers.

"I didn't know anything about sewing and paper-mâché," Hughes explained, who introduced the IAP activity so people who knew about construction and paper-mâché could build the puppets.

"Most of the people [taking puppet design] don't have any experience in puppetry. So, before they just enjoyed doing crafts. One person worked on a parade float... I just had experience building a lot of things," Barbulescu said.

H Hughes briefly explained to the students what he wanted and left the actual design and construction up to them. "Marshall told me from the beginning that they should be life-size and stuffed," Hughes said. "When the children came up and touched them, they almost felt human. He left most of the designs, the facial expressions, and the costumes up to,"

Hughes said.

"We are aiming for four puppets, but it might develop into a longer thing where we build more puppets to fit the other characters," Barbulescu said. The puppets represent the four main characters in the opera, the princess, the prince, the queen, and the magician. "The bodies are stuffed, and the heads are paper-mâché, but one of these characters will be very colorful.

IAP Activity Gives Students Chance to Help Homeless

By Michael A. Saglaw

Homeless advocate Byron II. Paladin spoke to an Independent Activities Period community service volunteer group two weeks ago about his experiences as a homeless man. During IAP, students enrolled in the Activities Period community service group provide volunteer work in a Homeless Shelter or another Community Service Organization.

Paladin, a six-foot, two-inch native of the South, introduced the IAP students to a shelter run by the Mid-City Center for Public Services, which houses 22 homeless women and children. The students worked in the York Street shelter, tutored immigrants in English, devised plans for and built four puppets, and organized children's recreation programs, among other activities.

"We beat up food and cut up bread," said Shalini Verma '95. She worked in the York Street shelter, where 22 homeless women are allowed to sleep every night.

"Twenty out of 22 [women] are the same from night to night," said Rob G. Gupta '95, who worked in the same shelter.

Verma found that some homeless people were very different from what she expected. "We met one person who had a master's degree. She was thrown out of her home by her family," Verma said.

Speaking in front of the class, Paladin said that in February 1992 he helped found the newspaper Spare Change, which is written and produced solely by homeless people. The paper sells for 10 cents a copy. Profits, which range from $10 to $50 a month, are spent on homeless causes, Paladin said.

Paladin said that he ran into some opposition when he started the newspaper. "People sometimes said, 'It's too much of a risk,' but the homeless people who had a master's degree that they can't do things. We need encouragement and a positive attitude that we can do something like this," he said.

Seven homeless staff members work full time for the newspaper; 61 volunteers, who are not necessarily homeless, also help out. The newspaper is published at The Harvard Crimson press.

Paladin added that in addition to the money earned from advertisers and sales, Spare Change recently received a $10,000 contribution from Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream. They will receive $5,000 from the Amelia Earhart Foundation to pay for newspaper equipment, and they may also be eligible for a $5,000 grant from Fund for the Homeless.

Paladin said that once people have been homeless for more than three months, they become "institutionalized." They go from meal to meal and from shelter to shelter. Most shelters only keep people for three days. Homeless people have to spend their time figuring out what they have to go to and where to go for the next meal. There's no time to think about long-range plans.

It is extremely important to find a job, Paladin said. Last year, 80 people treo to death on Boston area streets, he added.

Paladin feels that the chances of a homeless person getting a job are very slim. They have no address and no phone number. Because it is very easy for a homeless person to be robbed, they often have no identification. They have no place to keep things and so they lose a lot of available jobs are night jobs, but many shelters won't let people sleep there during the day and work a night job.

"What I want to do is use the puppets to do something, said Paladin, who has just had experience building a lot of puppets. "I've always liked to do things for the school-age kids and preschoolers."