Costumes and advice are her craft

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Reporter

In the deep recesses of the Lied Education Center for the Arts, there is a windowless room at a dead end of a dark hallway. Bursts of laughter, the tunes of Liz Phair and the humming of sewing machines stream out the door. This place, known as the costume shop, is Lindsay Pape's haven.

The costume shop is where costume designer Pape takes bolts of fabric and creates prison uniforms for "Dead Man Walking" and flower-like silk bodices for "The Nutcracker." She also passes on her knowledge to students in costume construction, costume design and theater makeup design classes.

The upcoming play "A Flea in Her Ear" will feature Pape's designs. The actors' long flowing skirts, a robe made of rich orange and fuchsia fabric and brightly colored, boned corsets will be evidence of her hard work.

She didn't always want to be a costume designer. Like many of her fellow theater majors in college, she started out wanting to be an actress. After spending time with other actors and actresses, she decided acting wasn't for her.

"I just didn't gel with them," she said. Costume design was a better fit for her artistic talents and she liked the control it allowed.

Two-and-a-half years ago, Creighton called her two weeks before a show was scheduled to open. She had just moved back to Omaha with her husband, who was working at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She was mainly doing freelance design work in Iowa. Creighton hired her without an interview and she went to work in the Lied's costume shop.

The budget she has to work with for the whole year is given to her at the beginning of the year. She then has to plan how much she thinks she'll need for each show. How to use the money for costumes and props is left to her discretion. This gives her the ability to be flexible from show to show, depending on whether she spends more or less than she anticipated.

Along with her designing and budgeting abilities, Pape's personality also draws a lot of attention. It can only be described in one way: positive.

"She never has a negative comment and always has a smile, except for when I scare her when she's in the costume shop alone," said Bill Deest, theater coordinator, co-worker and friend of Pape who has worked with her in the Lied Center for as long as she's been there. "Her positive energy draws in the students.

She is also known for her willingness to let loose and have fun. "She's very easy-going and approachable," said Laura Knudson, who's currently enrolled in two of Pape's classes. "She's always on our level."

Pape is also very popular with the work-study students in the costume shop. "All my costumes couldn't happen without people working for me. It's not a one-person job. I keep them well fed with junk food," she said.

A black plastic cauldron on a table in the center of the room holds the shop's junk food. It's usually filled with caramel, milk chocolates, suckers or various other sugary snacks. Around Valentine's Day the cauldron is full of Dove chocolates wrapped in pink and red foil. Two boxes of chocolates are also sitting on the table next to the cauldron in the spirit of the holiday.

She keeps the cauldron full of goodies for her work-study students and other people who wander into the costume shop. She also lets them bring in their own CDs so they can listen to music while they work.

Besides being a professor and designer, she holds a third job as an unofficial guidance counselor.

"She always has advice when we need it," said Lena Cigleris, a student and friend of Pape's who frequents the costume shop. "We call her the wise lady in the costume shop. She's our Yoda."

Pape joked that her future plans consist of getting the university to build a new costume shop with a window. She also mentioned that she would like to work in more regional theaters at some point and expand farther from the Midwest.

The costume shop's location is in stark contrast to the energy and optimism of Pape's personality and the upbeat atmosphere of the interior of the costume shop. Nevertheless, what Pape loves most has nothing to do with the location of the shop.

"The best part is when you go to a show and everything I'd envisioned happened," she said.