

Residents glow with prospects of stardom

by Marla Antelis
and Carol Mueller

Eleven hundred local area residents, some with stars in their eyes and hope in their hearts, vied recently for a chance to be cast in an upcoming made-for-TV movie.

From noon to 7 p.m., residents flocked to the Niles East High School facility in Skokie, to compete for nonspeaking roles in a proposed television movie entitled "Skokie." The film will deal with the National Socialist Party's (Nazi) unsuccessful attempt in 1978 to march through the northern suburb.

The movie, to be shown on CBS-TV (Channel 2), is being filmed by Titus Productions.

Of the 1,100 people, about 300 will be used throughout filming, said Susan Knutsen. Knutsen and her partner, Deborah Rosen, operate Casting Chicago.

EVERYONE PURSUING A role as an extra provided vital statistics and background information, and had a short interview with Knutsen or Rosen. Those who participated also had to bring a recent photograph of themselves.

Based on yet undetermined quotas, people under consideration will be contacted within a few days for a phone or in-person interview, Knutsen said.

For the film's crowd scenes, there will be a demand for persons of all sizes, colors and almost every age, she said. Extras are required to be at least 18 years old.

Casting Chicago found it would have quite a variety of people to choose from. Men and women in their 50s and 60s turned up at Monday's gathering, as well as young mothers with babies in their arms.

THERE ALSO WAS a sprinkling of professional actors, who whipped out composites and acknowledged they were registered with an agent.

While waiting in line, one pre-teenager from Skokie candidly voiced her resentment at being prevented from earning her claim to fame. "If a student is doing well in

school, why shouldn't we be allowed to try out?" Apparently, this 6th grader was too young to know about child labor laws.

An older woman from Lincolnwood confided that she was there "just for fun, to see what it's like." She also was surprised that she didn't see any familiar faces among two lines of prospective extras snaking around the length of the auditorium.

The woman generally approved of plans for filming "Skokie," but said she was unhappy with another recent made-for-TV movie, "Playing for Time." She said she disagreed strongly with the casting of Vanessa Redgrave in the role of Fania Fenelon.

A LIGHTHEARTED spectacle provided contrast to the Lincolnwood resident's intense views. As people waited to speak with Rosen and Knutsen, a local theater producer galloped up and down the lines promoting his upcoming musical production.

Knutsen said that during interviews, several prospective extras identified themselves as survivors of the Holocaust. Others said they had participated in the attempt to prevent the Nazis from marching.

Initially, some Holocaust survivors weren't especially thrilled that details of the thwarted Nazi march would be dredged up again, Knutsen said. However, "they showed up (to try out as extras) after they heard how the incident would be treated in the movie," she added.

Also among the masses were several local businesspeople who have the privilege of setting their own hours, Knutsen said.

SUCH FLEXIBILITY may work to their advantage. An extra is expected to have time to spare. Leaving rehearsals early will not be tolerated, Knutsen said.

The Casting Chicago firm wanted no one to have any illusions about working as an extra. Those who tried out were warned they could be idle during several hours of a full shooting day.

Extras will be urged to tote along a book or deck of cards. They also are war-

ned not to bother the director or actors for autographs and pictures.

There's also a reasonable chance that some Holocaust survivors will be chosen as extras, Knutsen said. However, she and her partner were careful not to give anyone reason to assume they'd be chosen.

While not putting anyone off, Knutsen delivered a tactful "don't call us, we'll call you" message throughout the interviews. Despite the effort, the Casting Chicago

phones rang steadily Tuesday morning with calls from the impatient and overzealous.

Filming for "Skokie" will begin Friday, and continue through December. Extras probably will work during the final weeks of November, and therefore could be expected to gulp down their turkey dinners.

An extra's stint probably will last two to three days. Each will receive \$30 in cash for every full work day.