

Meatballs gives Knight film break

BY ROBIN WAPLES
Of The Star

Because of Meatballs, Keith Knight will probably never eat hot dogs again.

But actually he relishes the idea.

In case you're confused, Meatballs is the name of a new summer camp type movie that features Sault Ste. Marie's Keith Knight, and the reason he won't eat hot dogs is because of a certain scene he had to do for the movie.

The scene called for Knight to take part in a hot dog eating contest, and by the time the director had the take he wanted, Knight had managed to force down more than 100 hot dogs.

Needless to say, he was glad the scene was over, and now declares, "I still don't eat hot dogs."

But giving up a certain food is a small price for an actor to pay in exchange for his first break in the movies.

Knight had been starring in a Blythe Summer Festival production when he auditioned for the Meatballs character, Larry Finkstein, an overweight counsellor-in-training. The film company wanted him so much they ended up buying out the rest of his theatre contract.

So this was to be his first crack at making movies, and the way it looks now, his debut film will be well received.

Meatballs premiered Friday in Toronto and already has brought in \$100,000 at the box office. It opens across the United States, July 8.

"I think the movie is going to be very big," commented



Jack Blum, Bill Murray, Russ Banham, Keith Knight and Matt Cravenn.

Knight in a telephone interview with The Star. "It's been getting a very good reaction."

The movie is directed by Canadian Ivan Reitman, who co-produced Animal House and it stars Bill Murray of Saturday Night Live, as chief counsellor Tripper.

Reviews — except for one — have been favorable. The Toronto Star hailed it "a feast of tender, tasty delights," but

the Globe and Mail panned it

as "an Animal House-inspired spoof that makes its predecessor look like Restoration comedy."

The Globe described it as "a mild affair, without enough raunch to power a Helen Reddy song . . . the kind of movie that everyone can identify with because everyone's been through the experience — like going to the bathroom or throwing up."

The Star disagreed by say-

ing the movie is "occasionally crazy, slightly off-the-wall, sometimes cleverly sarcastic and cynical, usually flippantly cliched and often remarkably sentimental."

Knight describes it as "an Animal House type film, but not as crude."

A lot of ad-libbing was done during filming and Knight said he and co-star Jack Blum wrote two of the scenes they were in — one on the tennis court and one in front of a tent.

The star of the picture, Bill Murray, also wrote most of his own scenes.

Filming took place in Haliburton, Ont. over a five-week period at the end of last summer.

Knight said he was "a little stunned" the first time he saw himself on screen but managed to get used to it. He said he had to learn "to relax and not be afraid to be big in front of the camera."

Because his character was eating all the time, Knight ballooned to 335 pounds during filming, but has since dropped down to 260.

Although he enjoyed acting in the movie immensely, he is enjoying the reaction to it even more. "I've seen the movie four or five times and it's really exciting seeing the reaction it gets. I do a lot of scenes with the character Spaz, and the audience seems to enjoy them."

Knight says there is talk of turning Meatballs into an American television series if it is accepted at the movie houses, and that he would look forward to the exposure he would receive on a regular series.

Prior to Meatballs, Knight did considerable work in community theatre.

He was named best actor at last year's Ontario Theatre Festival for his portrayal of Lennie, in the Sault Theatre Workshop's Of Mice and Men.

Meatballs will open at the Orpheum Theatre in Sault Ste. Marie later this summer.