

Shirley Jones' Sons Go Show Biz

By VERNON SCOTT

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — Shirley Jones, who made her movie debut in "Oklahoma" in 1955 as a pink-cheeked 18-year-old, is having difficulty discouraging her offspring from dropping their education for show biz.

Her son, Shaun Cassidy, 18, stars in the new "Hardy Boys" television series. Son Pat, 15, who plays drums and sings with a group at his high school, is anxious to chuck the books and jump full time into television.

So far Shirley's youngest, Ryan, 11, hasn't shown any interest in becoming an actor or singer.

Shirley's stepson, David Cassidy, set a glowing example for his three half-brothers by costarring with her as a teenager in "The Partridge Family" for four years.

Shirley is confronted with

the impossible situation of telling her offspring to get an education before considering a life of bright lights and greasepaint.

"I've never been in favor of children going into show business — especially mine," Shirley said. "I've wanted them to have a good education first. It's especially important for boys. Their father agreed with me on that."

Shirley was divorced from the late Jack Cassidy several years ago. During the last years of Cassidy's life he was estranged from his son, David. Indeed, David was closer to his stepmother than he was to his father.

Jack and Shirley shared the thought that David's booming career had played an important part in the father-son estrangement.

She has gone to great lengths to prevent any such recurrence in her own family.

"Show business is so unstable I feel my sons should be prepared to do other things," Shirley said.

"On the other side of the coin, Shaun, Pat and Ryan have grown up in a successful theatrical family. They aren't accustomed to seeing failure. Jack had an enormously successful career, and Lord knows I've been working steadily since they were born.

"If they'd ever had any doubts, the boys only had to look at David who was an idol for four years. They sat around the television set and watched every one of our 'Partridge Family' episodes.

"Then David would come over to the house and talk to them about the excitement and fun he was having.

"All our friends are show



Shirley Jones

folk. So my arguments against going into the business must sound pretty weak.

"And when I tell them how important an education is, they are happy to point out that neither Jack nor I went to college — and neither did David."

Shirley has mixed feelings about Shaun's sudden fame in "The Hardy Boys." Naturally, she's pleased with his success but she worries about it too.

"If the show becomes a smash hit," she speculated, "and Shaun becomes a sensation like David was, I wonder what effect it will have on his life.

"Shaun and I are terribly close and we talk the situation over all the time. But I remember too clearly when he was in high school how he wanted to drop out and tour with his band.

"Fortunately, Shaun has seen the good and the bad that has happened to David. And David has discussed the pitfalls of stardom with the boys

"One of the things David learned was that if you spend a year away from a show business career you're forgotten very quickly. Yet it was his choice to back off and get his hearings.

"I'm happy David is economically independent. He's married now and he has a big ranch."

Shirley recalled a touching moment when she took Shaun to the William Morris Agency for film and television representation. William Morris had been her agent for more than 20 years.

"Abe Lastfogel, the man who signed me to my first contract, also signed Shaun,"

she said. "Abe sat down and cried when Shaun and I walked in together."

Shirley, who won the Oscar in 1961 for best supporting actress in "Elmer Gantry," has seen enough ups and downs, tragedies and triumphs in Hollywood to realize there are more fulfilling careers in other fields.

"I'd rather see my boys pumping gas than be rich, famous, mixed up and unhappy in show business," she said.

"If they won't take my advice, I hope at least that Jack and I gave them good foundations and values — but you never know."