

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

LOCAL EXTRA

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SUNDAY
MARCH 27, 2011

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CARL LOVE

GOOD THINGS STILL IN MURRIETA

Here's a headline that longtime Murrieta residents such as myself have come to expect: "Suburban boomtown moves up fast."

Murrieta added more residents than any other city in Riverside County over the past decade. A whopping 59,184 people moved here, according to the census, more than doubling our city. At about 103,466 people, we've crept past Temecula, our more affluent neighbor.

A decade from now that same headline could apply to Menifee.

I've lived in Murrieta more than 22 years. There wasn't a chain store when I moved here. Not even a McDonald's. There wasn't a city government, wasn't a high school, wasn't much in the way of parks. There wasn't much of anything but construction crews.

And it was really cool.

There was a pioneer spirit. We were coming to "the sticks," a rural place where developers sold us on open spaces and we could craft the community we wanted.

Fast forward to today. I'm still living here, so that counts for something. Tons of the people who moved here about the same time are still here, too. We haven't ditched the place even though our kids have now moved away.

As always, city leaders talk about adding jobs — the latest hope is a technology center around the new Loma Linda hospital — but I'll believe it when I see it. What's long been recognized as the best real estate in southwest Riverside

MURRIETA: A teacher's film presents tales, such as her daughter's successful battle with serious illness.

BY PETER FISCHETTI
SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Carol Hernandez made a promise to God more than 16 years ago. On Monday, she will keep it.

At The Movie Experience at Cal Oaks in Murrieta, the curtain will rise at 6 p.m. for the premiere of "The Penny," co-produced by Hernandez and Victor M. Barba.

The movie is about six people, one of whom is Hernandez's daughter, Christina.

"I did the movie for a very personal reason," said Hernandez, who lives in Temecula.

Then she explained why.

Christina was 2 1/2 years old when she was diagnosed with incontinentia pigmenti, a rare genetic disease of the skin, hair, teeth and central nervous system.

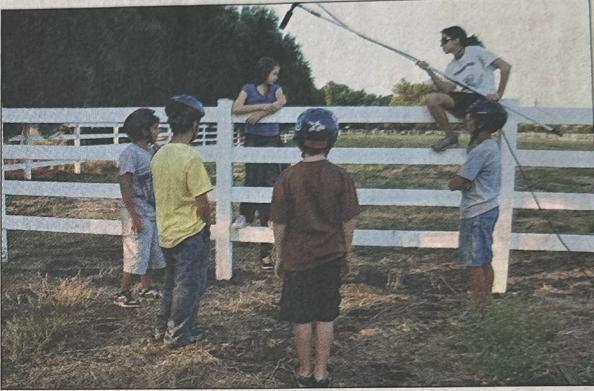
"I was told by the neurologist that Christina needed surgery on both eyes, she would have cone-shaped teeth, would become mentally retarded by age 5, and would be lucky to live to be 7 years old," Hernandez said.

Even with that bleak prognosis, her mother didn't lose hope.

"God will give you what you can handle," she remembered.

When Hernandez took Christina to church the next Sunday, the minister asked the congregation if anyone needed a prayer.

SEE "THE PENNY" / C7



SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE
Temecula and Murrieta locations were used for the filming of "The Penny." The independent film debuts Monday in Murrieta.

TARGETING BULLYING

Murrieta students play off personal experiences to pen 15-scene play

BY TIFFANY AUSTIN-SUNIGA
SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

About one-third of elementary through high school students are affected by bullying at school. And more than half of students have been victims of cyber bullying, according to bullystatistics.org.

Some Murrieta students are well aware of the problem — because most can be counted among these percentages.

On Thursday night, the advanced drama class at Thompson Middle School presented "Bully Proof," a 15-scene play they wrote



'THE PENNY'

CONTINUED FROM C1

"I need prayers for my daughter," she said, carrying Christina to the altar, where she was blessed.

"I felt my hands rise," Hernandez said. "I looked up and said to God, 'Please help me and I will tell everyone how you healed my daughter.'"

When the doctors tested Christina the next day and found no evidence of disease, they turned to Hernandez and said, "Your daughter is a miracle."

Today, at 19, she is a graduate of Murrieta Valley High School, where she played on the soccer and track teams, and now attends Mt. San Jacinto College, Menifee campus.

She is majoring in kinesiology, and is studying to become a pediatrician.

That is one of the compelling — and true — stories in "The Penny," written and directed by Barba, owner of Easy Music School, which provides instruction in various musical instruments at its studios in Murrieta and Temecula.

The movie follows the lives of six individuals whose common thread is a penny, which Barba personified as a living thing.

"Look at the year of a penny," the Murrieta resident explained.

"Think of that year. In real life, the penny would be somewhere."

What did the penny see? What would it think of us?

The penny is our conscience."

The six stories — four in English, two in Spanish with subtitles — are interconnected. Some have happy endings; others don't. All, Barba said, have serious themes.

"It's about turning to the Lord for help, about how

MOVIE OPENS

WHAT: "The Penny," co-produced by Murrieta teacher Carol Hernandez and Victor M. Barba, who runs music schools in Temecula and Murrieta.

WHEN: Monday at 6 p.m. is the premiere. It also will be shown Tuesday and Wednesday at 6 p.m.

WHERE: The Movie Experience at Cal Oaks in Murrieta, 41090 California Oaks Road, Murrieta

COST: Tickets are \$10

INFORMATION:

951-304-9798 or
www.thepennymovie.com

Maurice Benard, the "voice" of the penny, is an Emmy Award winner on "General Hospital." Lourdes Colon appears on the TV series, "Without a Trace." And Mathew Howard played second base for the Dodgers and the Yankees.

While all the actors donated their time, the film still cost about \$100,000 to produce, much of it financed by Barba, 50, whose story also appears in "The Penny."

"He was 14 and living in Tijuana when both his parents died.

"Our family was very poor," he said, "and I would live with a brother, then a sister. My story is 'Follow Your Dreams.' At the age of 18, my dream was to write music, and I have written all the music for 'The Penny.'"

In addition to the premiere on Monday, the movie will be shown on Tuesday and Wednesday at 6 p.m.

Tickets are \$10 and may be purchased by calling 951-304-9798 or visiting www.thepennymovie.com.

DVDs of "The Penny" also will be available, with proceeds helping to pay the production costs.

Peter Fischetti is a Press-Enterprise correspondent. Reach him at fischettipub@sbcglobal.net

BULLYING

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 ed by bullying.

"I'm personally by it so heavily because it does to my friends," Kiley said. "It can lead to so much we've gotten so much we need to be aware of now."

Fellow eighth-grader Garrett Speicher said Kiley's thoughts

"Bullying is a problem that's addressed in drug abuse and alcohol," Garrett said. "It's a funny and it ne

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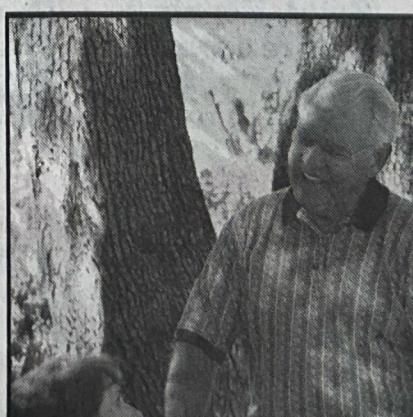
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*Worried About
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"It's about turning to the Lord for help, about how hard it is to forgive those close to us. It teaches that everything happens for a reason, and it asks what you are doing with your life right now. And it's about regrets."

"The Penny" was four years in the making, and it has a cast of more than 150, mostly from the Murrieta Valley and Temecula Valley unified school districts.

Hernandez, who has taught in the Murrieta Valley schools for 17 years, teaches theater and physical education at Dorothy McElhinney Middle School. Barba asked her to edit and augment his original screenplay.

Through children who came to his studio for lessons, Barba recruited their parents — two professional actors and a former Major League Baseball player — to play key roles in the film.

GARDEN

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benches and pathways. It is designed as a beautiful place where healing can begin.

"We are asking our community to partner with us to

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