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Holiday Indies Film in Orinda and Moraga

By Andrea A. Firth



Derek Zemrak (center) and Leonard Pirkle (right) on a film shoot in Orinda Photo Doug Kohen

naughty and nice list," says Zemrak. The dog chooses to help Max Moogle, a mischievous 12-year old orphan, make a move to the nice list. Santa's Dog is scheduled for a 20-city theatrical release, and Zemrak hopes the Bay Area premiere will be held at the Orinda Theatre.

"Moraga has a nice family feel to it. You notice it as soon as you arrive. It's a neighborhood kind of town," says filmmaker Adam Reeves, who will shoot his movie December Dilemma in Moraga for three weeks in July.

Reeves became familiar with Moraga's small town feel through his work on the California Independent Film Festival. He runs the Festival's popular Iron Film Contest.

December Dilemma explores what happens in a mixed religion family when Christmas and Hanukah fall at the same time. Reeves wrote the screenplay himself - "Everyone who has read the script has liked the concept," he says. He first shared the script with actress Beverly Washburn. Reeves met Washburn, who played Lisbeth Searcy in the 1957 film Old Yeller, when she was in Moraga for a screening of the film as part the New Rheem Theater's classic film series. In addition to Washburn, Reeves has also recruited veteran Hollywood talent Tony Dow (Wally from Leave it to Beaver) and father and son actors Richard and Ross Benjamin.

So if you are walking down the street this summer and you hear someone yell, "Action!" be sure to smile.

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The sleepy bedroom communities of Lamorinda are best known for their high-quality public schools and beautiful semi-rural setting-a perfect place to raise a family. So it should come as no surprise that two Bay Area filmmakers picked Orinda and Moraga as "perfect" locations to film their holiday family films.

Independent film producer and director Derek Zemrak recently filmed scenes for his latest movie Santa's Dog at Sweet Dreams in Orinda, and he'll be back in the city on May 31st to do more filming. "We needed a toy store location, and Sweet Dreams' location on a corner in Theater Square provides the perfect setting," says Zemrak.

Zemrak has a close connection to Orinda and Theater Square. He and partner Leonard Pirkle recently took over operations of the Orinda Theatre. They have been managing the New Rheem Theater in Moraga for almost a year. Zemrak's local indie film roots run deep. He is also Founder and President of the 13-year old California Independent Film Festival Association. The Festival was based in Orinda in 2010 and in Moraga in 2011.

Santa's Dog features the pit bull Hercules from Animal Planet's reality television show Pit Boss. "Hercules helps out with the Santa's