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## Lafayette's Award-Winning Young Filmmaker

By Rebecca Eckland



Samantha Bell with Jesse Harris, Executive Director of the National Film Festival for Talented Youth  
Photo provided

Samantha Bell is a sixth-grade student at Stanley Middle School. Blonde and slender, she likes to play soccer and write stories. She also recently won the "Most Promising New Filmmaker Award" at the National Film Festival for Talented Youth which was held in Seattle on April 28-May 1. Her mom, Julie, said the event was remarkably crowded, "There were young people there from 30 states and 15 countries." The award-- just like the film-- was unexpected.

One and a half years ago, Bell was taken to the Children's Hospital in Oakland (CHOO) where a series of tests confirmed she had a staff infection. "She was feeling awful," Julie remembers, Bell says she only vaguely remembers Baykids approaching her about a film project.

Baykids is a nonprofit organization which teaches filmmaking to hospitalized children, leading them through the steps of film production to tell their stories. They asked Bell what she wanted to do a film about. "I didn't want to do a documentary; I didn't want to be on camera." So Bell focused on another aspect of her recovery: origami.

She knew how to fold birds and boxes; skills acquired from school and a workshop at the hospital. To cheer Bell up, friends brought her origami cranes. It's no wonder, then, that the characters that populate Bell's film are these "creatures" that kept her company.

Bell made the film from a table propped on her lap in the hospital bed. Described as "whimsical", the resulting project titled "Owl and Friends" is two minutes long.

Bell claims her film is "not a story." And yet, the origami figures which come to life speak to the theme of transformation. The owl-- a figure which opens and closes the film-- steps aside while paper objects dance and turn. An open box appears: the paper shapes fall inside and come out again as cranes.

"It took 500 frames to make the film," Julie recalls. Bell set the scene, took a photograph and then moved the figures slightly and took another frame, a film technique called "stop-motion." She was also involved in the editing process. "She had originally wanted the soundtrack to the film to be *Fireflies* by Owl City, but she couldn't have that song," says Julie. Baykids, then, wrote an original score for the short film which has a similar feel to the song Bell had wanted.

The first time Bell saw her film was at the in-hospital film screening (an opportunity for every Baykids filmmaker). "I thought it looked really cool," she says

Bell's film attracted the attention of a Pixar executive who happened to be present. He was impressed and told the Baykids board that this film would be a potential winner at film festivals. Weeks later, Bell learned she'd been accepted to NFFTY's festival in Seattle. Once there, she gave a speech in front of a very large audience.

Thanks to Baykids, Bell has more than one way to tell her stories.

## Spinning Wheels in Lamorinda

By Cathy Dausman



Bikers stopped by at the Energizer Station at Lafayette Plaza Park  
Photo Cathy Dausman



Bikers in Orinda pose with the Energizer Station volunteers  
Photo Tod Fierner



The owner of this 1950 Cadillac convertible had a perfect day to cruise into Lafayette on Moraga Road...except that it was also "Bike to Work" day. He found this car in New York in a "grandma's garage" and brought it to California to enjoy.  
Photo Cathy Dausman

Sunshine, no breeze, camaraderie and free snacks--biking doesn't get much better than that. And if you're headed to work, well, there's Bike to Work Day. The Contra Costa Transportation Authority says its 17th annual Bike to Work Day was "a promotional event to encourage non-bikers to try commuting by bicycle."

Brad Crane, Lafayette Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) hosted an Energizer Station at Lafayette Plaza Park the morning of May 12. The table would re-open late afternoon hosted by Lafayette Chamber of Commerce members.

Other Lamorinda stations were at Lafayette BART (hosted by Hank & Frank Bikes), and Moraga Way at Brookwood Road, in Orinda (City of Orinda, host). One hundred such stations were staffed throughout Contra Costa County.

Crane says BPAC wanted to "feed and support cyclists who make commuting a daily effort." He says Bike to Work Day "gets bigger every year." In the spirit of the day, Crane biked to the station from his Lafayette home, towing a trailer to hold his equipment.

The 6:00 a.m. hour saw mostly

west bound commuters, those heading away from Lafayette and Lamorinda. Those who work in Lafayette arrived an hour or so later.

Russ Moore was on his way from Oakland to Concord, a 23 mile, 75 minute bike commute. It's his fifth year participating in Bike to Work Day. Moore, who said the Lafayette stop was "right in the middle" of his ride aims for 24 commutes a year when the weather is good.

Steve Biggs rode an hour from Clayton to his work place in Lafayette. It was his first day riding to work, and he took advantage of two Energizer stops in Walnut Creek before hitting the Plaza Park location. "See ya next year," Biggs said as he rode off.

By 8:00 a.m. Crane had tallied 30 station visitors and another 25 bikers passing by. "We're on target for a record day," said Lafayette Transportation Planner Leah Greenblat. She noted the weather, gas prices and the economy have conspired to increase bike ridership.

A contingent of eight representing the City of Orinda also biked to work. Dorothy Dickson-Dodds, Orinda Planning Department, has ridden the event for five years and organized the ride. The group included City Manager Janet Keeter (who rode in 2008), Kathrine Nasset (Planning), Richard Yee (Planning), Jeanette Irving (Police), Scott Tracy (Police), Joyce Boeckner-Colabianchi (Parks and Recreation), and Cathy Terentieff (Engineering). "Five of us began in Walnut Creek; one began in San Ramon, one in Alamo and one in Lafayette. We just meet along the way to Orinda," says Dickson-Dodds. "Richard Yee bikes to work two or three times a week; I bike home two times a week." Fortunately city hall has "bike lockers, bike racks, and a shower with a small locker room." She says the group "most certainly" will do the ride again and would love to challenge like-minded Lafayette and Moraga staff.

For information about biking in Contra Costa County, or the Bike to Work event, go online to <http://511contracosta.org/>.

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