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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

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 naughty and nice list,” says Zemrak. The dog chooses to help Max Moogge, 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 of 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.

Photo Doug Kohen

Seniors Fare Well at Health Faire

By Cathy Dausman

“This generation in this room is too darn polite for their own good.” So said Judge Joyce Cram to the 40-plus seniors in attendance at Moraga's Hacienda de las Flores Health and Information Faire on May 17. With that the founder of the Contra Costa County Elder Court launched her session on avoiding identity theft.

Through role-play, Cram debunked several telephone scams that prey on the elderly, including the grandchild in trouble, winning the Canadian Lottery, and a tax reward income. Such financial fraud happens because the elderly often lose their

ability to withstand undue influence, she says. Cram invited her audience to visit her when Contra Costa County Elder Court is in session Tuesday mornings.

Cram was one of several presenters at the 2011 health faire. Others included Love Is the Answer director Victoria Ryan, who recruits volunteer visitors for elderly and disabled; Alayne Balke, Fall Prevention Coalition; Gina Murrell, Mt. Diablo Memory Center and yoga instructor C.C. Kelly. Murrell offered attendees one-on-one memory screening using the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MOCA) test and emphasized the im-

portance of early diagnosis of Alzheimer's and Vascular Dementia. Certain memory losses, she said, can be reversed.

Food and drinks were provided by Sweet Tomatoes and Aegis of Moraga; vendors included Orinda Convalescent Hospital, Diablo Foundation for the Aging, Manor Care, Halo Monitoring Devices, Senior Helpers and Volunteer Center of the East Bay. Music was provided by jazz pianist Brian Teal. The program was presented in partnership with the Town of Moraga and Senior Helpers. The next Moraga Senior Faire takes place in spring, 2012.

Goal of Chemotherapy for Pets

By Mona Miller, DVM

The goal of chemotherapy in our pet friends is vastly different than for that of humans. Many pet owners don't want their furry friend to suffer through cancer treatment with the same negative experience that they have witnessed in friends and family members, and this concern is valid. Veterinarians feel that the treatment should not be worse than the disease.

In humans and animals, chemotherapy is medicine given to kill rapidly dividing cells, notably cancer cells. There are three major organ systems in the body that contain normal and healthy rapidly dividing cells; these three systems are the gastrointestinal tract, the bone marrow and the hair follicles. Chemotherapy medications do not differentiate between cancer cells and normal rapidly dividing cells, so these three systems are often negatively affected. This is why common side effects of chemotherapy are nausea, vomiting, inappetance and diarrhea, low red and white blood cells and loss of hair. Often, veterinarians and clients will tolerate lack of fur regrowth in areas that have been shaved for intravenous catheters, ultrasounds or surgical biopsy procedures.

Negative side effects on the gas-

trointestinal tract and bone marrow are not tolerated, however. Commonly, veterinary cancer specialists will prescribe anti-nausea medications to be given concurrently with the chemotherapy drugs, as well as mild narcotics for pain. When bone marrow suppression does occur, the chemotherapy protocol is often changed, whether by decreasing dosage or increasing the interval between injections, or by changing chemotherapy drugs completely.

Cancer cells can develop resistance to chemotherapeutic drugs, much like bacteria can to antibiotics. It is important in cancer treatment to prepare an initial attack that is deliberate and assertive in order to avoid this phenomenon. I counsel my clients that it is best to start treatment according to the veterinary oncologist's protocol, and to decrease or stop only if negative side effects are not tolerable, rather than to start with “just a little bit” of chemotherapy to see if it might work.

In human medicine, often the goal of cancer treatment is to cure the patient. In order to do so, all the rapidly dividing cells in the body are affected, and the patient often must suffer through the negative side ef-

fects. In veterinary medicine, however, the goal of cancer treatment is not to cure, but to get the patient into a stable state of remission. Remission occurs when there is physical shrinkage of a solid tumor or a noticeable decrease of measurable parameters (i.e., blood markers). In a state of remission, the patient is comfortable and enjoys a moderate to high quality of life, even if daily medications are necessary. The goal is to make the remaining time available as symptom-free as possible, and not necessarily to exceed average life expectancy for the patient.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her young son and two cats. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.

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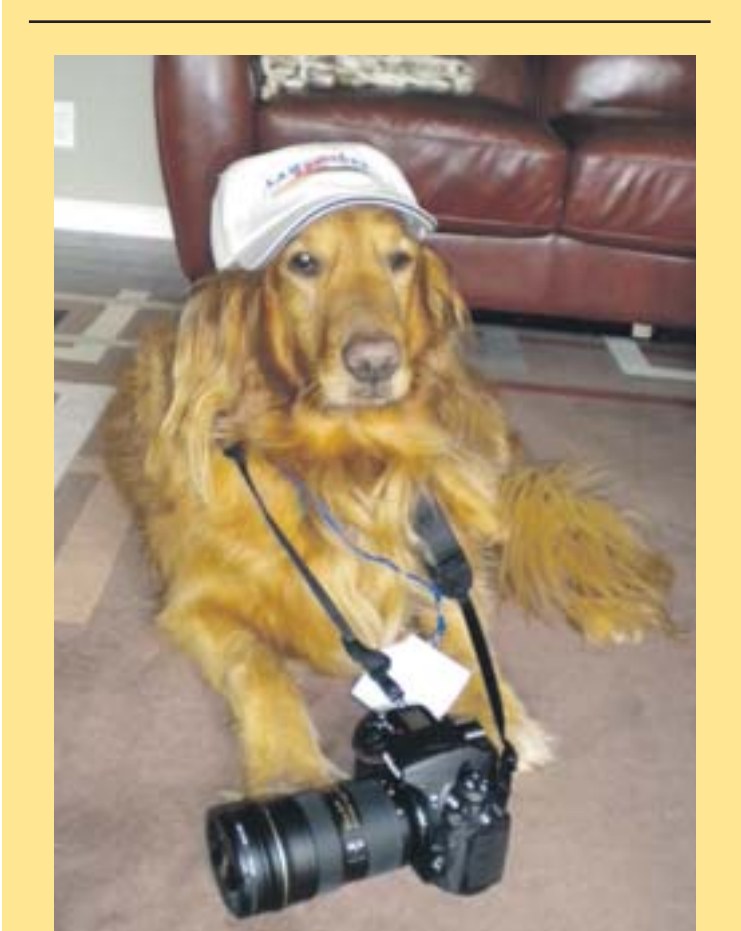


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As seen in Lamorinda... Saint Mary's Graduation on May 21st

Photos Cathy Dausman



Photographer's assistant Midas is well-equipped
Photo Eric Dausman