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# Gold Star Families Star at Town Hall Theatre

By Pippa Fisher



Jolie Vega and Tom Stack

Photo Pippa Fisher

Town Hall Theater will be holding a very special bonus component to the Nov. 5 Midnight Flyer concert as it will be holding a fundraising event on behalf of Gold Star Families — those who have lost family members in military conflicts.

Orinda real estate agent Tom Stack has worked as a volunteer on the board of THT for nine years and has brought in more than 30 rock and roll bands during that time.

“All the shows are benefits for the theater but in this case,” says Stack, “we are extending a hand to a group in need. Years ago, after a flood shut us down for a while, and threatened to shut us permanently, we have recovered, and feel that our current stability allows us to extend a helping hand. We will be fundraising on behalf of the Gold Star Families.”

Stack says he first thought about giving back to these families after he caught sight of his Lafayette neighbor, Yolander (Jolie) Vega, on the show “60 Minutes,” which was running a segment on Gold Star Families. The story made such an impact on him, he decided to find a way to give back using the show at THT that falls right around Veterans’ Day.

Vega lost her son, Senior Airman Jonathan (Jake) Vega Yelner in 2008 when the vehicle he was driv-

ing was struck by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan. Jake, as he was known, was 24 years old. He grew up in Lafayette with his brother, attending St. Perpetua School and De La Salle High School.

Vega remembers her son’s senior officer telling her that her son, when asked why he never seemed afraid, replied that his mother is a red-haired Puerto Rican and she is the only one he has ever been scared of! She says that Jake loved being part of the military. “It made a man out of him.”

Vega, now retired, worked for many years for BART. There is a plaque honoring Jake at the Lafayette station, which was placed there by BART’s Facilities Department and paid for by the workers.

Vega remembers that she felt very isolated in the days and weeks after her son’s death. She recalled that people would see her in the grocery store and head off down another aisle rather than have to say something to her. She said, “People don’t know how to handle it. Even in the military, they don’t know what to say.”

And yet, in the first week after she got the awful news, she received a visit from a couple of Blue Star Moms (mothers of members of the armed forces serving overseas). Vega cannot say enough positive

things about the organization. She says they were so supportive, particularly the Danville Chapter 101, including Patty Harris and Michelle Miller. Vega comments, “We (Gold Star Families) are their worst nightmare.” But, she continues, “I couldn’t have done it without them.”

It was a Blue Star Mom, Deb Saunders, who recognized the need for support of Gold Star Families and who started an annual event at the Marines Memorial Club in San Francisco, which was featured on “60 Minutes.” Saunders says, “You can express your sympathy but you cannot empathize with someone unless you’re walking in their shoes and that’s what I knew we had to do; (was) somehow gather these folks together, that they were better equipped in their journey to help one another.” Gold Star families are honored at this event. They talk about and remember their children — their lost ones are always referred to as “children.” As Vega says, “We don’t want our children to be forgotten.”

“We are not meant to be alone,” reflected Stack, as he described how he is hoping to bring the community together for a short while before the Eagles tribute band, Midnight Flyer, takes the stage on Saturday, Nov. 5 for education, awareness-building and fundraising for the Gold Star Families.

Stack, who worked for many years with the Grateful Dead, says, “There are many direct examples in my life, in my experiences, from the likes of Bill Graham, Carlos Santana, Ken Kesey, the Grateful Dead.

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Jake Vega Yelner Photo provided



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# Swedish Film ‘Ove’ Delights in Orinda

By Sophie Braccini



Image provided

There is a lot to love about this month’s international film shown at the Orinda Theatre, “A Man Called Ove” (En Man Som Etter Ove) from Sweden, a comedy-drama that tells the story of a grumpy old man. It is a very well-made, feel-good movie — with tears and laughter — that paints the subtle portrait of a desperate man finding his humanity again as he learns to see it in others.

As director Hannes Holm puts it, “A Man Called Ove’ is a story about life, and it is recognizable everywhere where life is.”

Rolf Lassgård, who plays the title role, is so grouchy, picky and simple insufferable with a complete straight face that one could believe at first that the movie is just going to be a sad sentimental tale. But it is in fact a very skillful mix of humor with more dramatic turns. Ove is a recent widower who loses his job in the first minutes of the movie. Very quickly, his serial attempts to end his life that constantly get interrupted gets funny. Most of

the interruptions come from a new family moving across the alley from him, a Swedish/Persian couple with two vivacious little girls and a mother who’s quite the opposite to Ove.

But the movie is much more than the tribulations of a set of neighbors that live on different planes. Another very important figure of the movie, Ove’s late wife, emerges by small brush strokes as flashbacks take the spectator into Ove’s past life. A beautiful character in many ways, she brings a softness and strength that balances Ove’s negative desperation.

American viewers will chuckle at the male rivalry and bickering over cars in a small neighborhood. Can a friendship be irreparably broken over the make of a car? Are some Swedes that chauvinistic about their automobile industry? The “car-syndrome” makes for a funny thread all along the movie.

Some societal and cultural phenomena are also touched upon here, adding an interesting aspect to the movie. Since his early years Ove has been the victim of what he calls “men in white shirts,” the people who represent the power and the rules that sometimes infringe deeply on individual rights. Ove was never a passive victim; he fought hard, but always alone. And it is when he understands the power of community and is able to reach out, that he will get his best victory.

Ultimately the powerful stature of Lassgård-Ove dominates the movie. The actor is a stage artist who played Brecht and Shakespeare. His finely nuanced portrayal of Ove makes the movie all the more believable and endearing.

The movie is based on the New-York best selling book “A Man Called Ove” by Fredrik Backman. It is the Swedish selection for this year’s foreign language Oscar race, and it is one of the best-rated films on the internet site Rotten Tomatoes. It was released last year in Sweden where it was a blockbuster. The showing at the Orinda Theater for a week starting Nov. 4 is a Contra Costa premiere. Go to Lamorindatheatres.com for show time and tickets.



**HARVEST SOUP  
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*November 23*  
**6:00 p.m.**

Please join us for our annual Harvest Soup Supper at 6:00 p.m. on Thanksgiving Eve! This LOPC tradition pairs hearty soups with a warm, peaceful time of fellowship as we begin our celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday. Supper is followed by a worship service at 7:00 p.m., as we gather together to give thanks for the many gifts in our lives.

**Tickets available now! \$8 for adults and \$4 for children (ages 4-12)**  
**Contact Matt@LOPC.org to reserve your seat.**

Invite your friends and neighbors to this festive and tasty community event! Questions? Contact matt@LOPC.org.

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