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The Weekly Newspaper of the Beach Cities



1:30 pm | RealFeel® High: 61
 Currently: | Humidity: 77
 59 | Winds: SE at 5 mph

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Question of the Week

Question: The Hermosa Beach City Council approved a parking ordinance that will allow local businesses to pay in-lieu fees and provide less parking than the current mandated requirement for some downtown businesses.

** Per an agreement with the Coastal Commission, the city is supposed to spend the funds on a parking garage. Is this a fair trade-off?*

** When parking is at such a premium, is providing less spaces downtown a good idea?*

** Should the city reconsider this ordinance once the parking structure has been approved?*

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Stepping Out

'Novel' Transition

By Michael Hixon

(Updated: Thursday, March 15, 2007 10:51 AM PDT)

When El Segundo resident Emily Skopov moved from New York to Los Angeles to become a filmmaker she ended up taking the television route, but her dream of making a feature film finally came to fruition with "Novel Romance." The romantic comedy is making its premiere at the Other Venice Film Festival this weekend.

Filmed almost entirely in Venice, "Novel Romance" stars Traci Lords as a workaholic editor, Max Normane, who has a sudden epiphany and wants to become a mother. In comes a struggling writer, Jake Buckley (Paul Johansson), whose literary career is stalled. But he has something else she wants to use besides his talent, his donated sperm. She agrees to publish his work if he becomes the father of her child. But they get more than they bargained for as their lives intersect and diverge while his career soars and she raises their child. "Novel Romance" also stars Sherilyn Fenn and Mariette Hartley.

Skopov, who studied at UCLA, got her first big break as a writer for the short-lived television series "The Client" in 1995. She moved on to "Pacific Blue," "Xena: Warrior Princess," "Farscape" and "Andromeda" before she realized she had to quit television in order to become what she wanted to be, a filmmaker. She sat down with friend and writer Eddie Richey, who had worked with her in television, and they both realized people with "baby fever" surrounded them. They didn't set out to make a film but one idea stuck with them.

"We wanted to write a script while on hiatus, something that would make us laugh, show intelligent characters speaking intelligent dialogue that didn't condescend to the audience," Skopov said. "You don't see a lot of smart characters speaking smart words in a fairly accessible film. We didn't set out to make a cerebral, intellectual film, but there's smart people living their lives having stories happen to them and you don't get to see that too often. We wanted to showcase some interesting female characters, assertive female characters that you normally don't get to see, three dimensions, flaws, everything, not being the girlfriend role. We just wanted to make ourselves laugh."

Without the help of any studio behind her, not only was Skopov the writer and director, but the producer as well, a burden she wished not to bear.

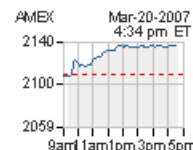
"It would have been nice if it was the studio's money and not having to do the work of raising finances, which is of course a challenge and takes a lot of time and a lot of effort," she said. "But I didn't have the contacts in the film world that would have made it a little easier because I came from a television background. But people responded to the script. That was the bottom line. I felt in some ways that made it easier because I guess people felt it was good material. The hard part is getting people to read the material. But once people read the material it



Traci Lords and Paul Johansson play unconventional parents in 'Novel Romance,' a film directed and co-written by El Segundo resident Emily Skopov.

Stocks

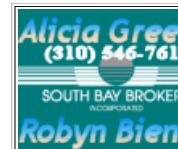
Market Watch



Index	Last Trade	Change
NASDAQ	2408.21	13.80 ↑
SP 500	1410.94	8.88 ↑
Russ 2000	793.60	6.55 ↑
AMEX	2140.12	28.73 ↑
NYSE	9158.27	67.27 ↑
30 YR BOND	47.07	-0.10 ↓

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managed to open the door. The script was definitely a good way to get people's attention and to listen."

The search for the actors to fill the shoes of Max and Jake was essential to the film. When Skopov saw Lords' name on a list of potentially available actresses, she said she couldn't get her mind off Lords in the lead role.

"I really kind of need someone who hadn't been maybe given the opportunity they should have been given," she said. "Maybe at this point Traci Lords should have been given a lead in a bigger film. At that I thought maybe she'd be interested in this opportunity. Sure enough, she responded well to the script."

Lords' past is well-documented.

Born Nora Kuzma in Steubenville, Ohio in a fractured household, her mother took Lords and her sisters to California when she was 12 years old. She spent one semester as a Redondo Union High student in 1984. Lords reportedly bought a fake driver's license, soon began hanging out in clubs in Hollywood and shortly after dropped out of Redondo High. With her fake license, Lords got a job modeling nude and began her career as a porn star at the age of 15.

Lords became nationally known as a porn star when it was exposed in the summer of 1986 that she starred in numerous X-rated movies as a teenager.

After studying acting at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute, she has starred in numerous "respectable" movie and television roles such as director John Waters' "Cry Baby" and "Serial Mom," and the television series "Melrose Place" and "Profiler." She also won the Film Discovery Jury award in 2001 at the U.S. Comedy Arts Festival for her role in Miramax's "Chump Change."

Skopov believes casting Lords was the smartest decision she made with "Novel Romance."

"Have I found a few places or people who frankly they can't put the past where it belongs?" said Skopov. "They can't acknowledge how hard she's worked and how good she is. They're obsessed with something that frankly should be irrelevant at this point. Yeah, there have been a few of those people, but I guess I'm more concerned with the other people who've had a really positive reaction to the film and they're certainly out there, and they've outnumbered the people who've shied away from the project for that reason. I think a lot more people are open-minded and there's certainly those narrow-minded people in Hollywood, a place not known for a lot of courageous people."

"One Tree Hill" veteran Johansson, who also starred recently in "Alpha Dog" and Fenn, whom Skopov calls an "indie goddess," rounded out the cast.

The fourth annual Other Venice Film Festival features 60 world premiere films, including full-length, short and animated films, by more than 90 filmmakers. Half of these works were filmed in Venice or were shot by Venice locals. Screenings, question-and-answer sessions, art, parties and live bands highlight the festival which takes place March 15 through 18 at two venues in Venice - The Electric Lodge at 1416 Electric Ave. and Switch Studios located at 316 S. Venice Blvd.

"I can't say enough about how much I love Venice," Skopov said. "I would set every film I write in Venice if I could. There's just so much to do there and so much to see. There's basically every type of humanity in Venice in one spot and every little piece of Venice has its own character and its own feel and almost its own culture. I loved it. To me it's ideal. How many places can you find urban grit and a beach with palm trees and chicks in thongs and bodybuilding guys and intellectuals? Basically it's every aspect of humanity stuck in this little tiny area of California."

In spite of her love for Venice, Skopov moved to El Segundo more than four years ago, mainly for a more suitable place to raise her children. She wanted to find a more affordable place to live and she loved the fact her children could walk to school when they got older.

"We looked into El Segundo, and it turned out to be cooler and hipper than I thought it would be," she said. "I had a lot of ideas of what it was and maybe several years back that's what it was but it had really changed even from the time I moved to L.A. It had really become a hipper, cooler area with a much more varied kind of person living there. I had always envisioned it as very, very white and conservative. It seems

like now it's open to all sorts of people of all colors, races, religions and political beliefs, which are also very important to me. The public schools are excellent. Now that I've lived here for several years, it really is an ideal place. Even though I miss Venice, and I miss it terribly, but I know for my kids, while they're small, is the best place for me to be."

Skopov said she is excited about the screening of "Novel Romance," which takes place at the Electric Lodge Saturday, March 17, at 3 p.m.

"I've lived and breathed this film for so long," she said. "There's nothing better than being with an audience and seeing how they respond to it. That's really why you do it and you hope it's good enough to have that opportunity."

For more information and schedules for all of the events, visit www.othervenicefilmfest.com.

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