

C H A M P I O N S C A N C O M E F R O M A N Y W H E R E



Disney
McFARLAND
USA

Disney
**McFARLAND
USA**



disney.com/McFarlandUSA

Disney
**McFARLAND
USA**

A
NIKI CARO
Film

CAST

Jamie White	ELSIE FISHER
Lupe	MARTHA HIGAREDA
Señora Valles	NATALIA CORDOVA
Ernesto Valles	BEN BRAY
Maria Marsol	VANESSA MARTINEZ
Laura	ADRIANA DIAZ CHAPA
Javi	RIGO SANCHEZ
Coach Jenks	CHRIS ELLIS, JR.
Dale Padilla	ELOY CASADOS
Coach Jameson	JOSH CLARK
Sonia Rosaldo	CHELSEA RENDON
Eddie	DANIEL MONCADA
Lola Valles	ASHLEY BRAVO
Clovis Coach	CHAD MOUNTAIN
Race Official (State)	J. DOWNING
Park Aide	BRIAN CONNORS
Fitz Mitchell	ALEX MACNICOLL
Brandon	VINCENT MARTELLA
Hunter – Centennial Runner	MICHAEL TONG
Blowdry – Stevens Creek Runner	BAXTER FRICK
Señora Soto	JUANA FLORES
Centennial Coach	REGI DAVIS
Palo Alto Runner #1	CONNOR WEIL
Palo Alto Runner #2	TYLER SELLERS
Starter (Race #1)	ANTHONY RENAUD
Stevens Creek Coach	BRIAN HAYES CURRIE
Principal Camillo's Assistant	SARAH BENOIT
School Librarian	ISABELLE ORTEGA
Young Cholo	JORGE LUIS PADILLA
Player #1	SALVADOR VELEZ
Player #2	ISAIAH GONZALES
Flirting Girl #1	CATHERINE TORIBIO
Flirting Girl #2	ROSA OCHOA
Grandmother Valles	REBECCA SILVA
Centennial Assistant Coach	JOHN FUNK
Morro Bay Coach	SEAN O'CONNELL
Palo Alto Assistant Coach	JEFFREY SELLER
Mariachi Band	MARIACHI SOL DE MEXICO
Mariachi Singer	ALFREDO LOPEZ
Kevin Costner's Stand-In	MARK D. THOMASON

Sports/Stunt Coordinator	MARK R. ELLIS
Stunt Coordinators.....	STEVE M. DAVISON
	ROBERT F. BROWN
Jim White Stunt Driver	NORMAN HOWELL
Stunt Fighting Student.....	DANNY D. CABRERA
Stunt Chola.....	VAIA ZAGANAS
Utility Stunts.....	MATT LEONARD
	SUNNY BYRD
	ANTHONY MARTINS
	RYAN STAATS
	MICHAEL RUNYARD
	CODY GILBERT
	BRANDON CORNELL

Unit Production Manager MARGARET HILLIARD
First Assistant Director LIZ TAN
Second Assistant Director RYAN D. CRAIG

Co-Producer VICTOR H. CONSTANTINO

Supervising Art Director.....KAREN STEWARD
Assistant Art Directors.....KELLY RAE HEMENWAY
KIRSTEN OGLESBY
Set Decorator.....ALICE BAKER
Leadman.....RICHARD LAMBERT
On Set Dresser.....AL ALMEIDA
Set Decorating Coordinator.....JENNIFER STOEFFEN
Set Dressers.....SCOTT W. LESLIE
ZACHERY ALEXANDER
JEFF HAY
JAMES "JT" TSVETKOFSKI
Art Department Coordinator.....BETHANY MEYER
Art Department Production Assistant.....EMILY BRUZA
Assistant Costume Designer.....LAURA FRECON
Costume Supervisor.....DAVID SWOPE
Key Costumer.....JENNIFER DA COSTA WOLF
Costumer to Mr. Costner.....AMBER JORDYN
Costumers.....WHITNEY GALITZ
JASON M. MOORE
LEO CASTRO
ELIZABETH MARTUCCI
HELEN FARADAY-YOUNG
JOSE S. HERNANDEZ
EDDIE GOMEZ
Cutter/Fitters.....DAVID J. MATWIJKOW
ERICA CIAGLIA
Table Person.....VARSENIK ANTONYAN
Ager/Dyers.....CAT COFFIN
KACY TREADWAY
Draper.....LYNNE DAY
Costume Production Assistants.....SARA ADRIAN SAMISH
ANGELINA COSCUNA
Makeup Dept. Head.....FRANCISCO X. PEREZ
Key Makeup Artist.....LUIS GARCIA
Assistant Makeup.....BERNADETTE BEAUVAIS
Hair Dept. Head.....RAMONA FLEETWOOD
Key Hairstylist.....TYLER ELY
Hairstylist.....NANCY MARTINEZ-MORRISON
Director of Photography/Splinter Unit.....DYANNA TAYLOR
A Camera/Steadicam Operator.....BELA TRUTZ
Camera Operator.....CHRISTOPHER A. SCHENCK
First Assistant Camera.....HARRY ZIMMERMAN
DAVID EUBANK
Second Assistant Camera.....TODD AVERY
SARAH BRANDES
Librahead Tech.....ADAM DEVITT AUSTIN
G3 Head Tech.....STEVEN MILLER
Technocrane Operators.....HENRY FLORES
CHUCK HARRINGTON
DAVID HAMMER
DERLIN BRYNFORD-JONES
Camera Loader.....YUKA KADONO
Camera P.A.....TYSON LINDO
Script Supervisor.....SUSAN MALERSTEIN-WATKINS
Production Sound Mixer.....RONALD JUDKINS
Boom Operator.....SCOTTY JACOBS

Sound Utility.....ERIC A. BAUTISTA
Video Assist.....BRYCE W. SHIELDS
Location Manager.....CALEB DUFFY
Key Assistant Location Managers.....LEE DAVID LEE
ZACHARY KAHN
CLAY VALENTI
Assistant Location Manager.....TAYLOR ERICKSON
Locations Production Assistant.....JOHN JAMIESON
Environmental Steward.....MATT RUSK
First Assistant Editor.....JAMES ANDRYKOWSKI
Second Assistant Editor.....MARIA PAULA GALDO
Editorial PA.....MARISSA SPENCER
Post Production Supervisor.....LESLIE RODIER
Post-Production Sound Services by
SKYWALKER SOUND
a Lucasfilm Ltd. Company
Marin County, CA
Supervising Sound Editor.....GWENDOLYN YATES WHITTLE
Sound Designer.....KRYSTEN MATE
Sound Effects Editors.....ROBERT SHOUP
TERESA ECKTON
JEREMY BOWKER
PETE HORNER
Dialogue/ADR Editor.....DANIEL LAURIE
Dialogue Editor.....CHERYL NARDI
Foley Supervisor.....ROBERT SHOUP
Supervising Assistant Sound Editor.....DMITRI MAKAROV
Assistant Sound Editor.....KIMBERLY PATRICK
Foley Artist.....SEAN ENGLAND
Foley Mixer/Recordist.....COREY TYLER
Digital Editorial Support.....SCOTT LEVINE
Post Sound Accountant.....RENEE RUSSO
Sound Re-Recording Mixers.....TERRY PORTER
DEAN A. ZUPANCIC
ANNA BEHLMER
Re-Recording Mix Technician.....ERIC FLICKINGER
Post Production Sound Facility
Services Provided by.....TECHNICOLOR at PARAMOUNT
ADR Recorded at.....THE WALT DISNEY STUDIOS
ADR Mixer.....DOC KANE
ADR Voice Casting.....HOLLY DORFF LONG
Digital Intermediate Services Provided by.....EFILM
Digital Film Colorist.....YVAN LUCAS
Associate Digital Colorist.....ELODIE ICHTER
DI Producer.....ROB PHILLIPS
Color Assist.....KATIE JORDAN
DI Editor.....DEVON MILLER
DI Optical Editor.....GUS DURON
Digital Opticals.....PAT CLANCEY
Dailies Colorist.....BEN ESTRADA
Gaffer.....TONY VARUOLA

Best Boy Electric	WAYNE MARSHALL	Running Doubles	ISMAEL SAMANO
Electricians	DAN JONES		JOHN RODRIGUEZ
	DONNY DEAN DAVIDSON		ALFREDO CONTREAS
	SIDNEY BRISCO		DAVID ROSALES
	JAMES "BIFF" THOMSEN		JESSE LORENZO
	FRED MICHAEL PALLUZZI		DAVID VALENZUELA
	PAUL STOCKWELL		MICHAEL RODRIGUEZ
Dimmer Board Operator.....	MARC MARINO	Assistant to Gordon Gray & Mark Ciardi	KAITLYN TAAFFE
Rigging Gaffer	EDWARD J. COX	Assistant to Niki Caro.....	CAMILLE BENTON
Rigging Electric Best Boy	CRAIG CAMPBELL	Assistants to Mr. Costner	BILL KENDIG
Rigging Electricians	STEVE HASTINGS		SHERI BAUER
	CHRIS BURR		
	KEVIN BARRERA		
	JERRY GREGORICKA	Senior Set Designer	AMY HEINZ-BARNETT
	KEVIN J. LANG	Set Designer	CAMERON BIRNIE
	DAVID GHEGAN	Graphic Designer	ERIC ROSENBERG
		Illustrator	HARRY WEINMANN
Key Grip	JOSEPH DIANDA	Mural Artist.....	ALBERT HERRERA
Best Boy Grip	RICHARD J. BOYLE	Lowriding Consultant	ANDREW LISTER
Dolly Grip.....	JOHN MANG	Construction Coordinator	CONRAD CHITWOOD
B Dolly Grip.....	JOSE A. SANTIAGO	General Foreman	G. LYNN MAUGHAN
Grips	WILLIAM MCDEVITT	Construction Production Assistant.....	TERRI MAUGHAN
	MATTHEW THOMAS MOLES	Propmaker Gang Bosses.....	STEVE BOUCHARD
	CHRIS CRIVIER		ECKWOOD SOLOMON
	BRUCE CAROTHERS		WILLIAM BRANCH
	FRED TROESKEN		NATHAN NANNIE
	DUSTIN VON LOSSBERG		
	JAMIE FRANTA	Lead Paint Foreman	KAY KROPP
Rigging Key Grip.....	MATT FLOYD	Paint Gang Bosses	MARET WICKEN
Best Boy Rigging Grip	JASON BLAISE CUNNINGHAM		RICK MCLEAN
Rigging Grips	FERNANDO BARRIOS	Stand By Painter	SARAH REGAN
	MINH BAHNSEN	Greens Gang Boss.....	PILO SILVA
	J.T. CODD	Greensman	DANNY REA
	SCOTT PATTEN		
Grip Trix Operator.....	JEFF WESSELS	Production Assistants	C.J. SEBASTIAN
			ROSS MALONEY
Property Master.....	DOUGLAS FOX		LAWSON J. RITTINER
Assistant Property Master	MICHAEL P. SWEENEY		MAX YANEY
Prop Assistant	MICHAEL E. JOHNSON		ISAAC MEJIA
			EWA PAZERA
Special Effects Supervisor	J.D. SCHWALM		ARIN MATHERN
Special Effects Coordinator.....	GINTAR REPECKA		TRISTAN RINGENOLDUS
			SENDEU FLIPPIN
Production Coordinator	ANGELA HEALD	Production Accountant	ALLEN E. TAYLOR
Assistant Production Coordinator.....	ERIN ENGMAN	First Assistant Accountant.....	CHERI HALL
Production Secretary.....	ERIC YONCE JOHNSON	Assistant Accountants.....	NABUTILU KHALAYI
Script Typist	JOY KECKEN		CAITLYN MARSH
2nd 2nd Assistant Director	STEPHANIE TULL	Accounting Assistants.....	JASON STACK
DGA Trainee	ALEJANDRO MORA		LINDSEY C. ELLIS
		Payroll Accountant.....	LORI IKEDA
Cross Country Coordinators	JESSI MOORE	Post Production Accounting by.....	R.C. BARAL & ASSOCIATES
	AIMEE MCDANIEL		HOWARD BARAL
Assistant Cross Country Coordinator.....	MIKE SHELDON		PAUL CAFFERTY
Cross Country Trainers	AMIE SCHROEDER		
	ZACHARY SCHROEDER	Unit Publicist	RACHEL ABERLY
		Still Photographer	RON PHILLIPS

"Turn the Stars Upside Down"

Written by Jack Conrad, Donald Goodman

Performed by Danielle

Courtesy of Music Supervisor Inc. & Resnik Music Group

"Watermelon Man"

Written by Herbie Hancock

Performed by Mongo Santamaria

Courtesy of Concord Music Group, Inc.

"Rafael El Colombiano"

Written by Andy Gonzales, John Salazar

Performed by Andy Gonzales

Courtesy of Platform Music Group

"Function Underground"

Written by Leonard Michael Lenaburg

Performed by We The People

Courtesy of Fervor Records Vintage Masters

"Flashlight"

Written by William Collins, George Clinton Jr., Bernard Worrell

Performed by Parliament

Courtesy of Island Records

under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"Me and Baby Brother"

Written by Sylvester Allen, Harold Brown, Morris Dickerson,

LeRoy Jordan, Charles Miller, Lee Oskar, Howard E. Scott

Performed by War

Courtesy of Far Out Productions, Inc.,

By arrangement with BMG Rights Management (US) LLC

"Ahora Te Puedes Marchar"

Written by Mike Hawker, Ivor Raymonde, Luis Gomez Roldan

Performed by Luis Miguel

Courtesy of Warner Music Latina

By arrangement with Warner Music Group Film & TV Licensing

"Mala"

Written by German Baratto Callejas, Scott Gerow

Performed by Los Dos

Courtesy of Crucial Music Corporation

"Whittier Blvd."

Written by George Dominguez, John Figueroa, William Garcia,

Benjamin Lopez, Roy Marquez, Romeo Prado, Jose Rendon,

George Salazar

Performed by Thee Midniters

Courtesy of Chattahoochee Records

"Las Mañanitas"

Performed by Mariachi Sol de Mexico de Jose Hernandez

"El Gavilan"

Performed by Mariachi Sol de Mexico de Jose Hernandez

"El Vals De Las Mariposas"

Written by Daniel Candon De La Campa

Performed by Mariachi Sol de Mexico de Jose Hernandez

"Suavecito"

Written by Richard Bean, Pablo Tellez, Abel Zarate

Performed by Mariachi Sol de Mexico de Jose Hernandez

"I'm Still Here"

Written by Clifford Curry

Performed by The Notations

Courtesy of The Numero Group

By arrangement with Bank Robber Music

"The Star Spangled Banner"

Written by Francis Scott Key

Courtesy of Extreme Music

Soundtrack Available on



American Humane Association monitored
some of the animal action.

No animals were harmed in those scenes.™

(AHAD 04357)



The Producers Wish To Thank

City of McFarland

Mayor Manuel Cantu

McFarland Parks and Recreation Department

California Film Commission

Film LA

Kern County Film Commission

McFarland School District

Will Rogers Historic State Park

California State Parks

County of Ventura

Central Valley Almond Assoc.

Los Angeles Parks and Recreation

Los Angeles Unified School District

McFarland Police Department

California Highway Patrol

Los Angeles Police Department

Special Thanks to
Jim and Cheryl White



Camera Cranes, Dollies, Remote & Stabilized Camera Systems by
CHAPMAN / LEONARD STUDIO EQUIPMENT, INC.

Cameras Provided by
OTTO NEMENZ INTERNATIONAL, INC.

PASKAL LIGHTING, INC.

Prints by
FOTOKEM



MPAA #49124



Copyright ©2014 Disney Enterprises, Inc.
All Rights Reserved

For the purposes of United Kingdom copyright,
Disney Enterprises, Inc. was the owner of copyright in this film
immediately after it was made.

Distributed By
WALT DISNEY STUDIOS MOTION PICTURES

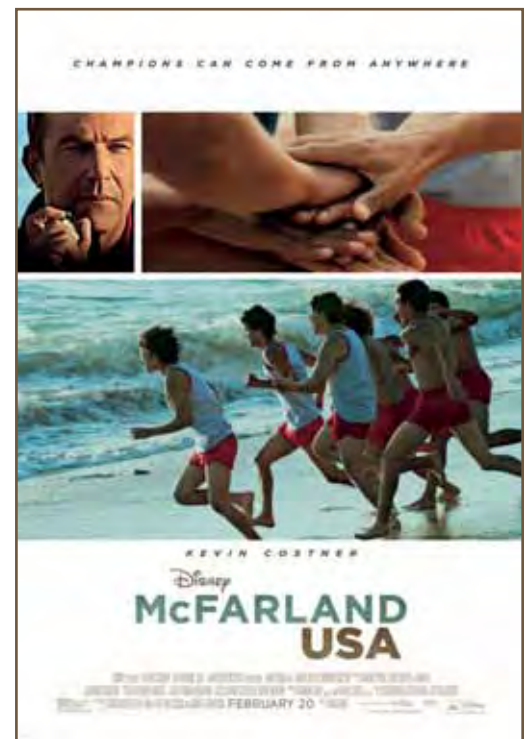


Disney McFARLAND USA

Based on the 1987 true story, Disney's "McFarland, USA" follows novice runners from McFarland, an economically challenged town in California's farm-rich Central Valley, as they give their all to build a cross-country team under the direction of Coach Jim White (Kevin Costner), a newcomer to their predominantly Latino high school.

Coach White and the McFarland students have a lot to learn about each other but when White starts to realize the boys' exceptional running ability, things begin to change. Soon something beyond their physical gifts becomes apparent—the power of family relationships, their unwavering commitment to one another and their incredible work ethic. With grit and determination, the unlikely band of runners eventually overcomes the odds to forge not only a championship cross-country team but an enduring legacy as well. Along the way, Coach White realizes that his family finally found a place to call home and both he and his team achieve their own kind of American dream.

Kevin Costner ("Dances with Wolves," "Bull Durham," "3 Days to Kill") stars as Jim White and is joined by a talented cast of veterans and newcomers that includes Maria Bello ("The Cooler," "Prisoners"), Morgan Saylor ("Homeland"), Martha Higareda ("Street Kings," "Smokin' Aces 2: Assassins' Ball"), Michael Aguero, Sergio Avelar, Hector Duran, Rafael Martinez, Johnny Ortiz, Carlos Pratts ("Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones"), Ramiro Rodriguez, Danny Mora ("The Eye," "Dragon Eyes"), Valente Rodriguez ("George Lopez," "It's Complicated"), Vanessa Martinez ("Lone Star," "Warrior"), Chris Ellis ("The Dark Knight Rises," "Catch Me If You Can") and Diana Maria Riva ("Love & Mercy," "Family Wedding").



Niki Caro ("Whale Rider," "North Country") directs "McFarland, USA," from a screenplay by Christopher Cleveland & Bettina Gilois and Grant Thompson, and a story by Cleveland & Gilois. Gordon Gray and Mark Ciardi are producing, with Mario Iscovich and Mary Martin serving as executive producers.

The producers and Caro assembled a talented group of filmmakers to bring their vision to the screen: Adam Arkapaw ("Animal Kingdom," "Lore"), director of photography; Richard Hoover ("42," "Payback"), production designer; David Coulson ("Whale Rider," "North Country") editor; and Sophie de Rakoff ("Runner Runner," "This Means War"), costume designer.

"McFarland, USA" releases on February 20, 2015.



THE START

The city seal for McFarland, California, declares that it is “the heartbeat of agriculture.” Indeed, the local crops are bountiful and diverse, from cotton to sugar beets to almonds to citrus to grapes. There has always been a small-town vibe to McFarland, a family- oriented, church-going community, which welcomed Dust Bowl refugees in the 1930s and became famous for the “Bakersfield sound,” a gritty mix of Western swing and honky-tonk introduced by local hero Buck Owens. By 1987, the time period of the film, Buck Owens’ rockabilly had been replaced by ranchera music, as McFarland’s population had become predominantly Latino.



The story of “McFarland, USA” began when Coach Jim White took an unlikely group of McFarland High School students and turned them into a champion cross-country running team, eventually building a cross-country dynasty. Year after year, Coach White’s kids won titles and their lives and the community were forever

changed as they achieved athletic dominance and, even more, overcame incredible obstacles to get there.

Executive producer Mary Martin heard about the local heroes when the media began covering their amazing rise. In 1999, she approached Jim White about turning the incredible story into a movie. In the ensuing years, the project eventually made its way to Disney and ultimately to Mark Ciardi and Gordon Gray’s Mayhem Pictures. Ciardi and Gray have a longstanding deal with Disney and a knack for inspirational sports movies, starting with their first movie “The Rookie” and continuing with their recent film “Million Dollar Arm.”

“McFarland, USA” resonated with producer Gordon Gray—and not just the athletic elements. “These movies are never really only about sports—the sport is just the canvas on which to tell the journey of the characters,” says Gray. “This is really about a man trying to find a home for himself and his family and he found it in McFarland. It’s also an opportunity to tell this inspiring story about his bond with this team. I think he really did want to give them something that would allow them to better their lives. But he was also a coach—he wanted to win. And they did.”



For the producers, the trick was to find a director who was passionate about the story and sensitive to the nuanced plot points and characters as well as the distinctive environment that is the Central Valley. It was also important that the director be able to depict cross-country running in a genuine way. They found all that and more in Niki Caro.





“We were always fans of ‘Whale Rider.’ Based on that movie alone, we thought she was the perfect candidate. I felt like she really had an understanding of the Maori culture, even though she wasn’t of it. All her research and attention to detail felt authentic. We just had a gut feeling about her,” says producer Gordon Gray.

Niki Caro adds, “I was looking at another project for Mark and Gordon and they suggested I read ‘McFarland, USA.’ I am always looking for a movie that has the same spirit as ‘Whale Rider,’ actually, and I saw the same heart and spirit in this material.”

Gray calls Caro’s approach “immersive” and it is an apt description of her process. Early on, Caro basically embedded herself in McFarland and the company spent three weeks filming in Jim White country, including the high school where it all happened.

“I am really comfortable making movies in real communities and I really value the collaboration between me as a filmmaker and the people that the film is essentially about,” explains Caro. “I never want to impose my will on a community because even though I

am the director of the movie, I can’t direct them to be any more like themselves than they are. So it’s very advantageous to me because I can see the truth of their lives and their world right in front of me.”

Caro began by meeting with Jim White and his wife Cheryl and the couple literally took her in. Relating the experience, Caro says, “Jim is an extraordinary man. I went and stayed with Jim and Cheryl and they introduced me to the amazing McFarland community. If you go to McFarland now, Jim is still out there on his bike, running with



the kids every evening and a lot of the original team is running also. That’s beautiful to me and a great reminder that ‘McFarland, USA’ is not just an inspiring and entertaining movie; it is in fact these people’s lives.”

BUILDING THE TEAM

Caro’s sojourn in McFarland had an added element as she set about to cast performers from the community. It was a long process and included “movie boot camp” for the novice actors she found in McFarland. But as a result, three out of the seven runners on the team in the movie are from the McFarland area: Sergio Avelar and Michael Aguero were actual runners and Ramiro Rodriguez was a champion soccer player.

Caro began to build the cast about a year before the start of principal photography and describes the very involved casting process. “The casting directors held open casting calls in McFarland, Bakersfield and San Diego,” relates Caro. “Then all of that footage was sent to me in New Zealand. Amazingly enough, the kids that really



resonated for me were the ones from McFarland. We narrowed down the list of candidates by giving them fundamental acting exercises and eventually committed them to tape so we could show the studio. And that's how we ended up with our team."



It's a casting style that producers Gray and Ciardi support and have also embraced themselves in previous movies. They cast real jockeys in "Secretariat" and went even further in "Miracle," as Gordon Gray explains: "Niki's approach is also our preferred way of casting movies. When we made 'Miracle,' we couldn't decide whether it would be better to cast actors and teach them how to skate or to get hockey players and teach them how to act. [Director] Gavin O'Connor and I took ice skating lessons for a day to see how hard it would be to teach a neophyte how to skate and after about a half an hour, we decided we'd be better off teaching a hockey player how to act. Then we went even further than that and got hockey players from Boston. So whenever possible I think you want to get authentic actors and athletes and sometimes they are one in the same. Sometimes it's better just to go to the source and Niki is really good with actors, so we never had any doubt."

As Caro lined up her team, she and the producers also found their coach in Kevin Costner, who was always the actor they hoped

would play Jim White. "I think it's always a good sign after you've filmed a movie that you can't see anyone else in that part and that's how we feel about Kevin," comments Gray. "He was the person we always had in mind when we were developing the script. He's absolutely perfect for that role. He's the right age, he's a grown-up, he gets kids and he gets coaching. He's a great actor. He's got a sense of humor. He conveys a real quiet strength."

Kevin Costner was a great hit with the young actors. He quietly mentored them and offered advice if they wanted it but for the boys, listening to Costner's stories and watching movies with him in his trailer was a highlight.

Gray adds, "He's always been one of my favorites. And he was great with those kids. It's helpful to have an actor who knows his way around a set, especially when you have young actors or in our case, kids who had never acted in a movie before. He used to give those kids tips in a really low-key way. They really looked up to him and I think they enjoyed each others' company in general."

As soon as Costner signed on, Caro began a close partnership with him that continued throughout production. "We worked quite thoroughly in pre-production on the script. We had a very close relationship even before we got to set. He's such a gift to this movie, such a great actor but an equally fantastic collaborator and a really generous man. I think he really brought not just strength to the role but also his tenderness and vulnerability and his care with the boys. He really mentored them; he was like a coach to them and that's something you



can't fake. That's the soul of the movie," says Caro.

From day one of the filmmaking process, Costner found Caro to be a real ally. "Niki has been true to me," says the actor. "She's been incredibly consistent and that sounds like a boring word but actually it's heroic and noble because that's what you want in life—somebody to be consistent. She's very creative and she gives me a lot of room but she has both eyes on me and has helped me directorially in certain scenes. She just came up to me and whispered something to me that made a big difference, so I've appreciated her as a director and as a friend."



The narrative and themes of "McFarland, USA" appealed to Costner, who says, "It's a heartfelt story but it's not a soft one. It definitely falls into the canon of Disney family films but among the elements that resonated with me was that it is a true story. You're thrilled that this could actually happen in this small, American town. Jim White represents the difference an individual can make in a community like McFarland."

That difference, Costner adds, did not just impact one generation of runners but many to come as Jim

White built a track-and-field dynasty in McFarland that exists to this day. But it all began with that improbable 1987 team. "They were like the little engine that could," says Costner. "They didn't have the trappings of success, didn't have the gym with fancy equipment and didn't even have the shoes. And somehow they did it. The greatest thing about athletics is that talent ultimately levels the playing field. Doesn't matter what economic strata you come from. Can you run? Can you play? Can you compete? Jim recognized that in these seven boys and taught them to see it and believe that, too. This story follows these seven boys on their way to manhood and in the process they set a standard in that town that was followed by the entire community. Now young people growing up there want to be a part of the McFarland cross-country team."

The area also had personal significance for Costner, a native Californian who lived for a time in nearby Visalia. "I've told people before that my favorite year in high school was my junior year in Visalia. I just loved the Central Valley. I found myself hunting and fishing in the mountains. I loved the fields. But in McFarland, there are a lot of migrant farm workers who vastly influenced the area and suddenly the town sort of grew up. I think our movie has attempted to portray that culture and I hope the people of McFarland will be happy with it," Costner says.



Caro adds that while Jim White certainly influenced McFarland, it is also true in the movie that his newfound hometown also deeply affected him. "It's certainly true in our movie and in the White family's own story that they got as much as they gave if not more so from the community. Jim White had an extraordinary and potent effect on those boys and their lives and that community but the community equally had a profound effect on the Whites," says Caro.





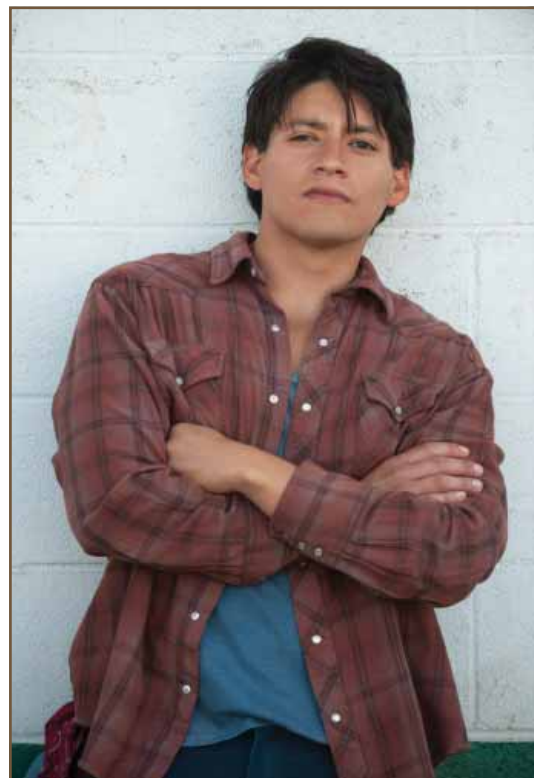
Working closely with the seven novice actors who make up the cross-country team may seem daunting, but Costner took it all in stride and embraced them all. “These guys, from the moment I met them, had smiles on their faces,” says Costner. “They came up to me and were very aware of the movies that I’ve made. They made me feel great and I tried to look out for them during the course of this movie.”

He adds, “It’s really easy to become a know-it-all, so I don’t want to try to be that. I can see what they’re doing and know that maybe they ought to do it differently but I would rather them come to me than

be out there telling them what to do. They know they can come to me.”

But in the world of the story, it takes a while for Jim to warm up to McFarland, and his students also regard him warily initially, especially the truculent Thomas, played by Carlos Pratts. Unlike some of the team, Pratts is a seasoned actor who starred on Season 1 of the FX series “The Bridge.”

Thomas is a gifted, natural runner but until he encounters Jim White, he doesn’t understand that this talent might provide not just pride and accomplishment but also a way out of his troubled home life and what he considers a bleak and preordained future. Through Thomas especially, Jim White begins to understand the grim reality that defines the lives of migrant workers and their sons and daughters. “Thomas has so much turmoil inside, he typically turns to violence first,” explains Pratts about his character. “He has also had to grow up fast and doesn’t want to burden people with his problems, so he’s very quiet and keeps it bottled up and is somewhat a loner. When he meets Jim White, he’s just another boss/foreman. The foreman runs the crew in the fields and he’s used to being yelled at by these people. Thomas’ day begins at 4 a.m.—he wakes up, grabs a tortilla, runs out to the fields, picks, runs back and by 7 a.m. he’s in school. His reaction to Jim White is, this is



my world and you don’t understand it.”



Jim’s recognition of Thomas’ athletic ability begins to bridge the cultural and emotional divide between them. “Jim constantly pressures Thomas to join the team and ultimately Thomas realizes that Jim isn’t using him for anything, he’s helping him,” relates Pratts. “He becomes much more than a coach; he becomes a shoulder to cry on and finally Thomas realizes he isn’t alone. Jim White saves his life.”

Off-screen, Pratts says that Costner was also a great



teacher and often Pratts learned by his example on how to behave both as an actor and as a person. “Working with Kevin was amazing and the way he treats people, so honestly and so openly, as a young actor, it was great to see and really helped me understand the kind of man I want to be. Working with him was one of the best experiences of my life,” comments Pratts.

In turn, Pratts performed a similar service to the young actors who played his teammates. “He brought a real kind of leadership to the group and really helped the other boys along,” Niki Caro notes.



The rest of the actors making up the cross-country team are: Rafael Martinez, Ramiro Rodriguez and Michael Agüero who play the Diaz brothers David, Danny and Damacio, respectively; Hector Duran as Johnny; Sergio Avelar, who portrays Victor; and Johnny Ortiz as Jose. Each had a different route to the project but together, Caro says, “All of them brought a really strong sense of family and community spirit to the movie.”

Martinez, soft-spoken, polite and sweet natured, sheepishly admits that he cut school to make the audition for the movie. “But it was worth it because I got the part and making the film was such a great experience on every level and it was a real education.”

Like many of the cast, Martinez met his real-life counterpart and took the opportunity to get to know and understand him and his journey. As is true of many of Jim White’s champion runners, David Diaz remained in the community and coaches kids today. “He certainly lives up to the character in the script,”

observes Martinez. “He is the oldest of the three Diaz brothers, the most mature of the bunch. He had to take on many responsibilities for the family and his brothers, and he took it upon himself to be on point, to make sure he was a good example for his brothers and his family. He has a big heart and great faith—he worked harder and prayed harder than anyone, which I admire about him.”

In fact, the Diaz family and McFarland in general struck a personal chord with Martinez. “It reminds me of the village in Mexico where my family is from—Colorines. Certain blocks in McFarland remind me of Colorines. It brought back so many memories for me. It is also a small, family-oriented community where everyone knows everyone and looks out for each other,” says Martinez.





The boys lead parallel lives as farm workers before they even arrive to school. Ultimately Jim White decides to truly understand the unique and daunting obstacles these boys face when he joins them in the fields, which resulted in an interesting on-screen moment between Martinez and Costner. “I’m probably the only actor who gets to say he taught Kevin Costner how to pick cabbages,” laughs Martinez.

Ramiro Rodriguez, a bit of a jokester off camera, is a McFarland native who makes his acting debut in the film. In fact, Rodriguez initially had no intention of auditioning. He was just the transportation. Describing how he came to get the part, Rodriguez says, “I went because my cousin needed a ride to the tryouts. One of the producers asked me if I wanted to be in the movie. I said no thanks. But he kept asking me and the next thing I knew, I was competing against my cousin! I had been planning to start college but I couldn’t pass up the opportunity.”

But as it turned out, Rodriguez had several connections to the film. “I knew about the story—in fact, Mr. Diaz [Daniel] was a counselor at my school when I went there for high school. I didn’t know that until I got to meet him for the movie. I was like, are you serious? When I found out I was going to play him, I was so relieved. He’s super nice and he’s a really funny dude,” says Rodriguez.

Not a runner and not a trained actor, Rodriguez had a steep learning curve to master. Fortunately, he had ample help from director Niki Caro and Kevin Costner. “The great thing about Niki is she is so supportive and really listens and encourages our ideas,” says Rodriguez. “She let me be me in a lot of the scenes, which made it much easier. And Kevin was amazing. If someone felt down or confused, he picked up that vibe and was so helpful, especially for me. I didn’t know anything about movies; I didn’t know what a mark was or how to look for camera and he showed me all that and gave me tips and told jokes and kept it light.”



Michael Aguero, who plays Damacio Rodriguez and is from the nearby city of Bakersfield, found real purpose and joy in “McFarland, USA,” also his first acting experience. Emancipated from his parents at age 14, he found solace and purpose in high school arts classes. However, he was working two jobs to support his young son when he heard about the open casting call. “I figured, why not, I should give it a shot,” relates Aguero. “I’m so happy that I did. I got to work with a lot of good people, especially Niki. She helped me embrace this whole acting thing, to try to create a career for myself in this. She’s been so helpful to me, so nice and generous and if I ever had anything on my mind, about the work or whatever, she was happy to talk to me about it. She pulled me aside many times, in her quiet, kind way and explained things to me. She had a lot of patience with me and I am very grateful.”

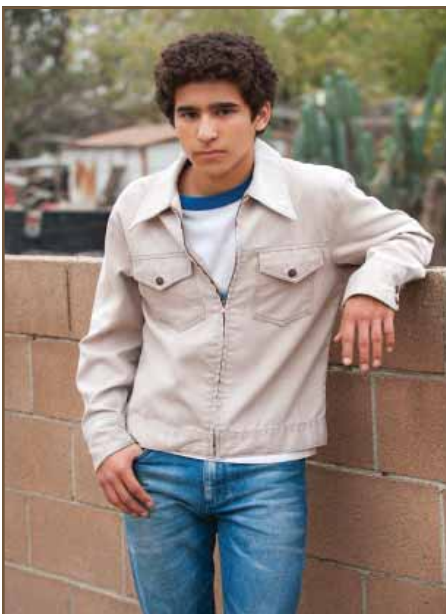
Caro was equally impressed with the young, novice actor. “Michael brought a smile to my face that I could not get enough of,” Caro says. “He stood out from the first time I saw him and that never ceased.”

Some of Aguero’s favorite memories of the movie were the locations. Because cross- country runners race in all



sorts of terrain, he experienced a cross-section of picturesque places, from the Central Valley to Los Angeles. “I really enjoyed Griffith Park. I had never been there before. I had no idea that was where the Hollywood sign was! The views were amazing, you could see all the way to Malibu Beach. Castaic Lake was just beautiful; running down to it, you could see the dam and all the mountains. It was amazing,” enthuses Aguero.

A particularly indelible scene for Aguero was one in which Coach White takes the team to the beach for the first time in their lives. The company shot that scene at Sycamore Cove in Malibu. Like his character, that scene also marked Aguero’s first visit to a beach and first plunge into the Pacific—a chilly introduction to the ocean, considering the October shooting date. “It was brutal,” recalls Aguero. “I jumped in and immediately wanted to jump out. They shot it with two cameras and you could see me in the wide angle but not in the tight because I wanted to scoot! So we did it again. It was definitely cold but it was fun.”



Hector Duran, the affable thinker of the group, has been acting since he was 9 years old, appearing mostly in small television roles, but “McFarland, USA” is his highest profile project and his first feature film. His description of his character Johnny is not too far from Duran himself. “Johnny Sameniego is a very bright, witty kid who likes to have fun and also get things done at the same time,” says Duran. “He helps get the team together, in a really uplifting way. I really love my character; he always has a big smile.”

Duran spent a lot of time with his real-life doppelganger, who is still a huge part of the McFarland community. “Mr. Sameniego still lives in McFarland and when we shot there, I was able to get to know him personally,” remarks Duran. “He was very welcoming. He had me over for dinner and his brother-in-law is the mayor of McFarland, so he invited me over to his house, too. The entire Sameniego family was very hospitable. They took me on a

tour of McFarland and were so nice to me. They showed me the house where he grew up and all of the medals that he won. He was very gracious but also humble.”

Sergio Avelar, who plays Victor Puentes, is also a McFarland native and a former runner and member of the McFarland Track Club. He had a prior personal relationship with Jim White and one of the original runners. “I’ve been running since 2001 and I was always a decent runner,” says Avelar. “One of my coaches was actually the role that Carlos plays, Thomas, when I was in middle and high school. He’s a great man. He took us to the meets that weren’t on our schedule, like the Junior Olympics. He really inspired us to do good things, on and off the field. And Coach White? Legit! Just a



fantastic person, wonderful and very nice. Even after he retired, he still helped us out at the practices and meets. He was always really easy to get along with and he was always color blind. Even though he is Caucasian and we are Mexican, it never mattered. He and his wife are the coolest, most wonderful people.”

According to Avelar, his character, Victor Puentes, is “a cocky, machismo, ladies’ man.” “He’s always preening himself and always checking out girls and making sure he gets the attention,” says the young actor. “He gives Jim [Coach White] a hard time, but just being a smartass. He doesn’t give White any respect at the beginning, but once his uncle talks to Jim, Victor sees that he is okay and that he needs to give him respect. Victor’s uncle is his father figure because his father is in jail. His uncle’s trying to keep him out of the gang life and it seems like Victor’s trying to get in, just trying to still be that little badass. To get him away from that, the uncle is telling Victor to continue running. Whatever his uncle says, goes.”



Caro has nothing but praise for Avelar and says, “Sergio was magnificent and particularly helpful to me in understanding the running because he ran in state championships for McFarland.”

Johnny Ortiz knew he wanted to be an actor at age 5 when he saw “Spy Kids.” After years of studying, his first real audition led to a role on “Southland,” which led to other small parts but none like Jose in “McFarland, USA.” Describing Jose, Ortiz says, “He’s a shy, quiet boy and that was fun to play. I’m usually playing the crazy, loud one in high- speed car chases. Jose’s different; he’s humble and loves poetry. And he loves to run. When he runs, it’s like his anger comes out. I used to wake up every day and jog in the Rose Bowl. It’s so much fun. You just feel the breeze, like nothing can stop you and in that way, my character and I are very similar.”

That’s not to say Ortiz didn’t have his moments of craziness, especially in the car wash scene. That sequence involves the community coming

together—Anglo and Latino—at a makeshift car wash put together to raise money for the McFarland track team. “I felt like I was with family in that scene, it was so real,” comments Ortiz. “Washing cars, playing with the folks, dancing with the music. There’s a sequence where Michael [Aguero] and I breakdance. When that ’80s beat came on, I did a front flip and Michael was like, ‘Whoa!’”

Ortiz adds that in general his teammates and Costner contributed to that familial feeling, on and off the set. “I truly bonded with all the guys, they’re





really wonderful,” says Ortiz. “We really connected and related to each other. And Kevin was a big part of that. Sometimes, after we would rehearse on set and they would start lighting and placing cameras, Kevin would go over the scene with us and tell us what he thought. Or we’d go to his trailer and watch movies. It really did feel like a family.”

This little family of young men underwent a powerful and, for some, life changing experience in filming “McFarland, USA,” from athletic training to acting. They all rose to the occasion, impressing everyone on the crew, including Caro. “It was very intense for

them, even for Carlos, who had more professional acting experience,” says Caro. “But for the others, who had

never been in a movie before, it was seismic. It was amazing to watch them go through that experience and to get them on the set that first day. I talked to the crew as I do always before I shoot and one of the things I said to them was, ‘These kids are really green and we need to take care of them. We need to recognize that they don’t know anything and if they screw up, be gentle and generous.’ But they never did; it was like they were born to it. It was amazing how effortlessly they came to it. They were well-cast and well-prepared, but in the end it comes down to the fact that they are just great kids and amazing people.”



Rounding out the cast is the White family—Maria Bello as Jim White’s steadfast wife Cheryl and Morgan Saylor and Elsie Fisher as their daughters, Julie and Jamie. Prior to principal photography, Caro organized an informal gathering for the on-screen White clan that proved insightful for her and them. “In pre-production I got the White

family together—Kevin, Maria, Morgan and Elsie—and had them play Monopoly as a family. That was really interesting, even in a tiny little exercise like that, watching the family dynamic just click in, and that’s the way it was for the rest of the shoot,” says Caro.

Bello was incredibly moved by the “McFarland, USA” script and committed to the project almost immediately after reading it. “The humanity of the story really touched me; these kids and their passion and what they had been going through with their families, the work they had to do, all the huge, emotional and physical obstacles they had to overcome,” informs Bello. “And then the dedication that they had for cross-country and for Jim





White, this man who incited in them this commitment not just to running but to themselves and each other. It was fantastically empowering and inspiring. I've always related to the underdog. How these young men, with Jim White's encouragement, rose beyond their circumstances with such grace really spoke to me."

Of course, at first, Cheryl, wary of her new neighbors, is not thrilled about the family move to McFarland. Her initial view of McFarland is narrow but she and Jim slowly come to understand that they have more in common with the people of McFarland than they initially anticipated. Bello, a bonafide human rights activist, was particularly interested in Cheryl's philosophical transformation, particularly as it relates to events today. "Cheryl doesn't begin the movie being a citizen of the world, in a lot of ways," explains Bello. "She's lived in a very small box of a life until she gets to McFarland and realizes that there's so much that she hasn't seen; so many different kinds of lives that people are living. And in her own way she becomes

an activist, I suppose. It's so relevant even now to what we're going through in terms of the migrant workers, fair pay, immigration and our borders. I think it illustrates that we can be more open and understanding of the people who are here picking our food."

Kevin Costner, with whom Bello shared many of her scenes, says that Bello brought subtlety and strength to Cheryl, which made her role more than just the



standard-issue spouse. "Maria's a world-class actress and she commands the screen," comments Costner. "She has presence and she's given that wife role a lot of dignity and a lot of authority and that's because she knows how to hit her marks and she knows how to deliver those lines and be authentic. Maria's very skilled and doing as much as she can but not trying to do too much. She's playing a person who is willing to tell her husband when she thinks he's wrong and also able to love him for the things that she knows are going wrong in his life."



Morgan Saylor and Elsie Fisher, playful and affectionate with each other, connected like sisters on and off screen. In fact, all the ladies developed a special bond. "The girls are fantastic. Morgan is incredibly mature for her age, a deep thinker and artist and always effortlessly herself, so there is never a false moment. And Elsie is so funny, quite a free spirit," enthuses Bello.

"Maria is wonderful," adds Saylor in response to Bello's praise. "She's a really sweet person, so smart and funny. She and Elsie and I would hang out and giggle for an hour over nothing. Or sit in Maria's trailer and talk about



clothes or life, whatever. Everyone was so great but that bond with Maria and Elsie was a real treat and made all of our scenes together really fun.”

Saylor shared several scenes with Costner also, as a father and daughter who not only have to navigate McFarland but also their own precarious relationship. “Kevin is really cool and one of the most fascinating people I ever met,” says Saylor. “It was fun to get to know him and to work with him. He’s an interesting actor to watch; he’s really present in the scene and he really works it out in rehearsal. It’s not just about getting to set and



performing when the camera rolls. I definitely asked him a lot of questions and he was happy to answer them. Plus he’s lived such an interesting life and had great stories.”



Saylor and Carlos Pratts also had several scenes together and in some ways their characters’ friendship becomes a bridge between the Whites and their new neighbors. Saylor often had lunch with the rowdy bunch of boys and was bemused by their off-screen antics. “They were a delight and a handful,” remarks Saylor. “I worked the most with Carlos and we got along really well. But it was fun to

hang out with them. Sitting at a table with all seven of them was a little overwhelming. They have a lot of energy and humor. But they were all really kind and excited to be a part of this movie. I think it is an important story to them and they loved the chance to be on set and especially to work with Kevin. They called him KC and every day they would say something like, ‘You know what KC told me?’ They were very cute and enthusiastic.”

Rounding out the cast are Martha Higareda as Lupe, Danny Mora as Sammy, Valente Rodriguez as Principal Camillo, Vanessa Martinez as Maria Marsol, Chris Ellis as Coach Jenks and Diana Maria Riva as Señora Diaz.



MEET COACH JIM WHITE

Jim White taught school in the town of McFarland, California, for 40 years and coached for 25 of those years. He came to McFarland straight out of college and what he accomplished there not only changed the lives of many students but also changed the community forever.



It was in 1987 that Coach White started McFarland High School's first cross-country team. "When a coaching position opened up at the high school, I applied for it," recalls White. "I was told that there was no cross-country program, so I said, 'I think your last Athletic Director actually said that you're going to have cross-country next year.' So when that happened and the principal found out that was true, they offered me the position."



Over the years since 1987, the McFarland High School cross-country teams have won nine state championships and the small school is considered a powerhouse in the sport.

That year was the first year that California offered a state championship in cross-country and White went into coaching his runners with his eyes on the big prize. It was no surprise to him that his upstart team brought home the trophy. "I knew we'd win," declares White. "We go into every meet like we're going to win anyway but we had run against most of those people somewhere during the year and compared times so we knew we had the ability to do it."

Coach White took an interest in each of the runners and worked to impart life skills and sound advice along with his coaching. "I think every coach probably wants to instill that if you work hard, you can have some success in anything—your job, your school, your running, your sports," comments White. "So just work hard and that's what we tried to do. I came up with the idea that attitude is really important, so we talked a lot about attitude and that it's all in your attitude."



White thoroughly enjoyed getting back together with his original team for the movie and catching up on where they all are now. "I feel wonderful about it. Another thing I've tried to tell them is that if they are going to college, come back to the community and give something back. And that's what they've done. They've paid it forward.

They're still doing it. But it's all about the attitude, giving back and making yourself, your family, your town, your community, your school proud and that's what we're trying to work on."

White adds, "We've tried to inspire these current kids in the same way and they're doing the same thing that I did and that's good. They're just paying it forward; they're helping people who don't need to ask for help but they're willing to help them and to go the extra next mile."



TRAINING CHAMPIONS

Like the real McFarland team, all seven young men had to train to become cross-country runners. Although some had more track-and-field experience than others, all of them took their drills very seriously. To prepare the actors, the producers hired their go-to coach Mark Ellis. “Ellis is the first person we usually call on for these movies and this was no exception,” remarks Gordon Gray.

Although Caro had never worked with Ellis before, she too became a fan. Throughout the shoot, she only referred to him as Coach. He not only trained the runners, he also crafted a pivotal football game that was shot in the very high school where Jim White taught back in the day. “Mark Ellis was extraordinary,” enthuses Caro. “I don’t even know where to start except to say that Coach Ellis, firstly, prepared our actors for running so safely and so well. They were in such peak condition physically and mentally. He designed the football sequence so impeccably I just had to show up and shoot it because that, as a New Zealand girl, I could not have done myself in a million years. He was just such a great collaborator in the making of this movie. He had the sports covered and he had everybody ready. We worked closely to bring the physical and the dramatic together in a way that was really convincing but also really moving.”



Ellis appreciated Caro’s commitment to precision and verisimilitude when it came to running and relished the idea of training the boys to become both athletes and actors. “I knew when I first talked to Niki that I was in for a treat,” says Ellis. “Whenever I hear directors say, ‘I want this to be as authentic as possible and not only that, I want to try to cast a combination of real cross-country runners and actors,’ it is exactly how I like to work. Because the age-old question comes up: Do we want to cast an actor and teach him how to run? Or cast a runner and teach him how to act? Niki was up for mixing that up. The lead character that Carlos [Pratts] plays

obviously had so much drama and some of those emotional scenes with Kevin Costner, so you really had to have an actor there. But with the other seven guys who were on the supporting part of that team, Niki saw an opportunity to cast runners and work with them on their acting.”

Ellis adds that the team evolved over time and training them wasn’t as simple as merely putting shoes on their feet. He explains, “Niki knew they needed to look real on the screen when they were running. And you think, okay, how hard can it be? It’s running. They don’t have a ball, they don’t have a stick, they don’t have a glove or a puck, they don’t have to shoot a basket—they just run. But there’s an art, literally, to it. Your body needs to be trained to run at long distances at specific speeds, depending on the race and the terrain they were going to have to run through.”



Ellis and Caro also enlisted the local McFarland cross-country coach to help them with the training and every morning at 8:00 a.m. the boys would show up for running practice. Says Ellis, “Believe me, they would just do that; they would run. We worked on building their endurance, trying to keep them healthy, making sure they didn’t



pull anything. We’d start with two and then they would cast another and there would be three and then another week would go by and we would add four. We’d literally start to see this team grow right before our eyes. So over the course of four or five weeks we had our McFarland team. Every time we added another character, it was so neat to see how the other guys embraced the new guy when he joined the team,” Ellis says.



Ellis adds that there are specific complexities associated with the sport of cross-country that he had to anticipate and manage, particularly in filming the final state championship meet. “We knew for the end race, that state championship, we had to have 120 runners,” informs Ellis. “It was almost like a battle scene where 120

runners had to be choreographed. Running 3½ miles, the average race gets done in 15, 16 minutes for a state championship. No way is a guy supposed to run 12 hours a day, which is what happens when you shoot a movie. It was extremely tough on these kids. Cross-country is not just running around a track. These guys run through creeks, they jump over rocks and logs, they run up and down huge hills but they were absolutely into it; they wanted to make it look great. Niki chose great kids with great character. It made my job easy.”



All the actors approached the sports sequences with grit and tenacity, perhaps none more than Ramiro Rodriguez whose character Danny experiences a personal milestone in that all-important state championship. Suffice it to say, Rodriguez was as jittery as his character on the day the production filmed that race. “On the first take of my big scene, I was fine but the second take, the nerves kicked in,” explains Rodriguez. “I was nauseous and threw up! Then one take, I began to run before they called action; they shot the starter gun and I took off, like it was a real race. Eventually I got over it and it was really fun.”



In the script, Thomas is a natural runner with prodigious talent but no training. The reverse was true for Carlos Pratts, who zealously prepared for the cross-country scenes and, in the process, became a runner. In addition to drills with Coach Ellis, he worked out with personal trainer Brian Nguyen at his BRIK Fitness in Redondo Beach, California. Nguyen famously got Mark Wahlberg into boxing shape for “The Fighter” and did likewise for Pratts.

Even Niki Caro got into the fleet-footed spirit, although her Herzogian approach to the material was more so she could get a sense of how to stage and shoot the movie. Still there were beneficial side effects. “You have never met anybody in your life who hated running more than I did,” comments the director. “All my life, I hated it but when I signed on for this movie, I thought, well, I’m going to have to run. So I started running. And I’m still running. I really enjoy it and the act of running illuminated a lot of things for me.”



Caro notes that expressing cross-country running on film is very interesting because it is not like running around a track. “It’s quite unique and races are always run in a different environment, which, cinematically, is a big treat because I could put those races in really extraordinary places. It does come down to the first

mile marker, the second mile marker and the finish line, however, in terms of letting the audience know where we are in each race. But shooting that was fun and gave us a lot of latitude because we weren’t tied to a track.”

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

The movie took the cast and crew to some of the most beautiful spots in Southern and Central California, from Lake Castaic to the Griffith Park Observatory to Malibu, in addition to the fields and neighborhoods of Bakersfield and McFarland. Several of the actors had never visited the different locations before shooting, as Ramiro Rodriguez relates, “It was nice traveling. I like going over there into all those places. Coming from McFarland, I’m not that kind of person that goes out. I’ve been to the beach but I haven’t been out there a lot. So it was amazing. I took a lot of pictures because I just want to remember all of it.”



Although the company spent only three weeks in McFarland, that time was crucial to the movie. “It was important to me that we shoot in McFarland,” says the director. “So often in movies—and this is just my opinion—it feels so artificial. In a movie like this where the place and the people are real, I consider it my responsibility to put that on screen in the most authentic way possible. For me, that means going there to film as much of the real place and the real people as I can because nothing is better than that.”



Shooting in McFarland also offered some unique cinematic opportunities; specifically the haunting embankments of almonds covered in protective plastic that served as training hills for the team. The expanse of these weird mounds across the landscape was visually arresting and certainly emblematic of McFarland, home to Blue Diamond Almonds.

Those almonds also reflect Caro's approach to filmmaking. Although she strives for authenticity, the film is not a documentary; her aesthetic is "epic and intimate." "I feel very comfortable with taking real people and putting them into the classically framed cinematic vision," says Caro. "I think there's a place for that. That is



gorgeous to me. The way the movie is lit is as naturally and beautifully as possible because there's a very strong intention for this movie to be culturally and visually very specific and genuine. There's real and rare beauty everywhere, particularly in those almond mounds. I was so determined to shoot there—nobody's ever put that on film before and that gave us a real and exact sense of their world."



The heat and ever-present layer of residue from the fields also played a part in the look of "McFarland, USA." "Richard Hoover, our production designer, me, Adam Arkapaw, our DP, and Sophie de Rakoff, our costume designer, find a visual language of the movie together, the feeling of it, the shape of it, the color of it," informs Caro. "In terms of the look of the movie, we're trying to be very faithful to 1987, so that's another way we're trying not to look like glossy, digital 2014. It's shot on film. The place is full of dirt and particles so there is a lot of backlit dust, which is again both very authentic and specific but also very beautiful and cinematic."

Another critical piece of the world of "McFarland, USA" happened to also fortuitously dovetail with one of Caro's passions—lowrider cars. When the Whites see their neighbors parading about the neighborhood in their gleaming lowriders, they immediately fear the worst. This proves to be a huge misconception. Caro explains, "Lowriding was very big in the Central Valley in the mid-'80s. Bakersfield was one of the lowriding epicenters of this area and this country. I have a strong connection to it because my husband is a big part of that culture, so I know way more about lowriding than a middle-class white



woman from New Zealand should. And unless you count the sort of terrible beauty of agriculture on a massive scale, there's not a lot of glamour in McFarland. The cars in the movie gave us that. Not to mention that lowriding is such an iconic Mexican phenomenon that I wanted to have it in the movie."



Caro continues, "I know from personal experience that lowriding in contemporary moviemaking is usually shorthand for gangster culture and so that's the way a lot of the world perceives it. But the truth is that lowriding and car clubs are essentially about family and community."

Caro took particular interest in the main lowrider vehicle and not just in service of the movie—it's her personal vehicle. "Our hero car is a 1976 Chevrolet Caprice (aka a Glasshouse)," says Caro. "The Glasshouse was an '80s icon so we built the car to be period-accurate, with a chain steering wheel,

adjustable suspension and a beautiful paint job with metal flake and pin-striping. The mural on the hood is in the likeness of a character's girlfriend whose name is Lupe and it's in the style of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which is one of my favorite images and an ongoing visual theme in this movie."

The Virgin of Guadalupe loomed large on the "McFarland, USA" set—literally. Caro's video monitor slowly became a shrine to Mexico's patron saint, as it was an ongoing artwork decorated by the entire crew. It began in Bakersfield after the production shot part of a festive quinceañera scene, a Mexican rite of passage for 15-year-old girls. "I asked the props department for a Virgin of Guadalupe to overlook my video monitor," recalls Caro. "And they also brought some of the crepe paper flowers that had decorated the car for the quinceañera. It quickly became an interdepartmental project. The grips built a special platform and the scenic artists painted it in the colors of the Mexican flag and then we added the flashing image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the candles and the incense and the food offerings. It was a beautiful thing but quite the mission for the guy moving it from location to location."



There was a throwback quality to the costuming look of "McFarland, USA," which also accurately reflected the community circa 1987. "It would never have been appropriate to go over the top with the look of the movie, even though it is set in the 1980s with Mexican influences," comments Caro.



“We were fortunate enough to enjoy the generosity of the community who opened up their photo albums to us, so it was very easy for us to see what it looked like then—the way they wore their hair, what clothes they wore. In these rural, worker communities, it’s not ’80s in terms of style the way you would expect to find on an American TV show of that period. Or even the L.A. culture. The Central Valley is about a decade behind a big city like Los Angeles so the styling of the movie was more from late ’70s to mid-’80s because when you work in the fields, you are wearing clothes that are just worn and worn and worn. The clothes they wore were very specific to field work and if you drive through the Central Valley today, you’ll see people wearing the same thing—big hats and bandanas and lots and lots of clothing because the sun is so fierce you need to protect yourself.”



Costume designer Sophie de Rakoff was tasked with bringing Caro’s vision for authentic costuming to life. She started her process by reading the script and discussing the characters with filmmakers. Explains de Rakoff, “I would present visuals to the director and show her visual references, which were aside from the actual, physical images that we had of the Whites and all the boys. I would come to her with all the documentary references from that time period and use that as a vocabulary of how I wanted things to look.”

De Rakoff knew from the beginning that she did not want Maria Bello to look like Cheryl White; she was her own person and had her own character. “Even though the movie is set in the ’80s, we felt that Cheryl was still holding onto probably something from when she was a little younger; holding onto stuff from the ’70s,” explains the costume designer. “So her silhouette was not the crazy ’80s silhouette that you would normally expect. She starts off as a Midwestern housewife and is fairly traditional in how she dresses, but it was more in terms of palette. It was about starting her with more muted colors and earth tones and then as she becomes more and more integrated into the town, she moves into warmer, brighter colors that are more traditionally associated with Latin American people as a culture.”



The costume designer admits that the colorful quinceañera party scene was “great fun,” and comments, “The quinceañera was inspired by real quinceañeras, which is a 15-year-old girl’s coming-out party. So, it was the girl’s and the townspeople’s chance to get dressed up in their best, whatever their best is depending on their social





status, and a chance for the Whites to embrace this cultural celebration.”

De Rakoff enjoyed solid cooperation from the town in the process of designing the costumes. “A lot of it started initially with the school and the school records and then the men that were on the 1987 team,” relates de Rakoff. “Most of their families still live in that town and one of the families kept extensive scrapbooks. There were photo albums of the kids when they were tiny children, but then for each child they had their own scrapbook and their own photo album. They were one of the few

families that actually had a camera and they also cut out all the newspaper clippings. So they had extensive documentation of what was going on with them at that time.”

THE 1987 RUNNERS REUNITE

On the outskirts of McFarland, six of the seven original Latino runners from McFarland High’s 1987 champion cross-country team reunite in the early morning to run once again—this time for an end sequence in “McFarland, USA.”

Sitting in a spot that used to be a grove of olive trees, Thomas Valles, the 1987 team’s No. 1 runner, comments, “This is the area where we used to come and train—the McFarland High School cross-country team—and to this day they still bring out the high school teams, boys and girls, and the youth. This is where it all started. We have a course that we raced out here; three miles when we were in high school, just different roads of oranges, almonds.”



Thomas Valles



David Diaz

David Diaz, the oldest of the three Diaz brothers on the team, adds, “We used to pride ourselves on beating the Bakersfield schools and beating the other bigger schools. We would come out here with Mr. White, even on Sundays. Mr. White would pick us up after church and we’d go on an easy 5- to 6-mile run up in the hills. We would just come out here



and have fun and we looked forward to competing in these races because the races that we competed in were not as hard as where we trained.”

Victor Puentes, poetically summing up the nostalgic feelings that the surroundings evoke, says, “Here’s where we earned our stuff. Here’s where all the real sweat was made. All the effort and all the heart of the team were made out here.”

When the conversation switched to Coach Jim White, the former teammates had a lot to say. “Mr. White is just an incredible guy,” says Danny Diaz, one of the Diaz boys and the No. 7 runner. He adds, “It doesn’t matter who you are; he treats you as his own son. But it’s just that he inspires you. He



Danny Diaz

knows how to get the best out of you year after year. And it doesn’t matter if teams changed, or there were new runners every year or a school is good this year. McFarland has been a champion year after year after year and that is a tribute to our coach, Mr. White, and his wife Cheryl. They are just champions.”

Thomas Valles continues, “He always set a goal for you that was achievable but it was actually quite a feat to do. He has always instilled to work hard, set small goals to work to the big goals, kind of climbing a little hill, then a little bigger hill until you get to the top of the peak of the mountain. To this day we still use the same system of setting goals, whether it be in life financially, setting goals with our kids or with the current teams that we have in high school or the track club.”



Damacio Diaz

Damacio Diaz, the third Diaz brother, adds, “He cared. He literally showed that he cared for us as individuals. We had great parents. My dad and mom worked a lot. They had to support a big family and so they didn’t have the opportunity to go to after school conferences or to our sporting events and Mr. White, he did and he was there. At times, he fed us,

clothed us, took us to different trips for activities and showed that he cared for us as individuals, which made us want to do for him and please him.”

Johnny Sameniego, the No. 2 runner, considers Jim White his “second dad.” “He showed me the world; there’s a different world out there,” relates Sameniego. “Our parents were hard workers and I have three siblings and we all graduated from college and we did what our parents strove for. But he showed us a new world. We went out there through sports, but we saw the world through different eyes. It was neat.”



David Diaz has his own take on why the filmmakers were intrigued by the story of Jim White and the little team that could: “We’re just like any other championship team that has won a state title or anything else. But one of the main reasons that I think the filmmakers liked this story is the continuity and the camaraderie of the leadership that Mr. White displayed all along. We were able to win back then and we’re still continuing to win now. We were champions back then and Mr. White instilled that in us. We try to win at everything we do. I coach now and I try to instill in the kids what Mr. White taught me. I put my little flavor and twist into things and try to motivate like I was once motivated. I try to give back to the kids just like Mr. White gave to back to me.”

But life wasn’t just about school and cross-country for this team as several of the runners had to work in the fields to help earn money for their families. This extra responsibility added more to their already overflowing plates, but the boys took it in stride. Danny Diaz explains, “My brothers [Damacio and David] and I worked in the fields. After school my mom would come pick us up in her car and we couldn’t practice with the team; we had to go work and we’d work till sundown. After that we would come back and Mr. White would be waiting for us and he’d practice with us for the second time because he had already practiced with the team.”

Remembering the 1987 state championships brings back a flood of memories to the team. “I remember them announcing that there was going to be a state championship in 1987, so we set the goal of these little mountains to win league, to win the central section and the big peak of the mountain was to win the state championship,” recalls Thomas Valles. “A year prior we knew it was coming so we prepared ourselves. We even made t-shirts. It would’ve been disappointing if we didn’t reach the top, but we did.”

A number of the original runners on the championship 1987 cross-country team became educators in the McFarland school district. The former teammates are not only working in their hometown, but also raising their families there and actively supporting the cross-country teams of today by coaching, helping out with the meets and practices and donating goods or money so the teams have what they need.

Continuing, Valles adds, “I remember it was really dramatic the way it all happened. One of the runners had a bad race and luckily, though, you have seven on a team, the first five count to score. When somebody doesn’t run good, somebody always steps up to do the job that somebody might’ve fell short of. It happened that day and when we thought it was out of our grasp, the numbers came back right and we were the 1987 state champions. And that’s how it all got started.”



Johnny Sameniego

Johnny Sameniego vividly remembers the end of the race: “We were excited but we were also actually confused. We thought we had lost. You have Mr. White and you have all these other parents counting. Everybody’s keeping track on paper. We all started gathering up at the finish line and looking at Mr. White and he says, ‘Yeah, we lost.’ So we were

heartbroken. We had worked out the whole year. So at that point we were devastated. Tears started coming down. Everybody started crying. Mr. White takes the score sheet and turns it in to the officials. Then the officials



have to score it and they're the ones doing the official scoring. And lo and behold, Thomas is running down from the hill. He's screaming and yelling and we're still distraught. He comes over and says we won. Mr. White comes after him and sure enough, we had pulled it off. Then the tears of sorrow became tears of joy and that was our '87 season."

All the team members agree that making "McFarland, USA" in the actual town of McFarland was a big boost for the community. David Diaz offers, "What it means for McFarland is huge. We're known for cross-country, No. 1. Anywhere you go, they've heard of McFarland cross-country. It's a way for us to depict McFarland in a good way, in a good light. We're no longer known for the cancer place or where all the shootings are or the gangsters or this and that. I think it's going to be something honorable that we can say we were a contributing factor to and we were able to participate in."

Danny Diaz echoes his big brother: "To have it in our hometown is awesome. It's going to put McFarland on the map. A lot of the students there at the high school where we work are all excited as well."

Adding his two cents, Damacio Diaz says, "It's hard to really believe that this is happening here in this town and involving us. We are all good guys; we all went to college; we all tried to please our families in what we were supposed to do but no one would've ever thought that we'd have this huge production in this town talking about us. It's very humbling and pretty awesome."

Victor Puentes sums up, "It's great for the town. It's a small town. We're really basically just a little dot on a big old map. This means a lot to the town. Means a lot to me, too. I'm proud of this. At the time when we earned the state championship, it really wasn't like a big deal. Now they've won so many over the years. We're finally getting the recognition that we deserve but mostly Mr. White. He's the one who deserves all the recognition. He's the one who made all this."



Victor Puentes

Over the years, all the runners have heard people ask why McFarland won that day and why they still continue to win. But David Diaz is quick to give them an answer: "It has to do with hard work. It has to do with the tradition that was set a long time ago by Mr. White. We have been coming out to these hills for 30 years and it's funny that we have neighboring cities that travel 20 to 30 miles, like Wasco, to come over here and try to see if this is what produces champions. They quickly find out that not anybody can just come out here. You have to believe in what you're doing. You can call it brainwashing, you can call it whatever you want. We're a cross-country city and that's what we do."

THE FINISH LINE

Director Niki Caro's mission is to pay tribute to the McFarland community that offered her and the film so much. "It's a personal thing for me but the first time I show the movie to the people of McFarland, the same as when I showed 'Whale Rider' to the people of the east coast of New Zealand or 'North Country' to the people of the



Iron Range, it's an experience that I can never replicate in any other part of my life," says Caro.

"It's so special to have people see themselves up there in lights and hopefully see the beauty and the truth and the humor and the heart of their own existence," continues Caro. "Particularly for 'McFarland, USA,' these are people that in the context of America are often an invisible culture and yet they contribute so much. This is an entertaining movie with a lot of heart and a lot of soul, but it does honor a huge portion of this country that doesn't get honored enough."

Summing up what she wants all audiences to experience when they see "McFarland, USA," Caro says, "I hope that audiences will come away from this movie extremely entertained, amused and moved, and maybe with a clearer appreciation for the gigantic contribution that people like these make to this country."

*"In the end, the American dream is not a sprint, or even a marathon, but a relay.
Our families don't always cross the finish line in the span of one generation. But each generation
passes on to the next the fruits of their labor."*

—Julian Castro, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs



ABOUT THE CAST

KEVIN COSTNER (Jim White) began his career starring in independent films, gradually earning small parts in more established movies. His first major motion-picture role was in the coming-of-age comedy, “Fandango.”

Throughout his career, Costner has varied his choices with comedy, action and drama roles. He has appeared in such popular box-office hits as “No Way Out,” “Bull Durham,” “Field of Dreams,” “The Bodyguard” and “Wyatt Earp.”

Costner’s exceptional filmmaking abilities were showcased in “Dances with Wolves,” which he produced, directed and starred in, and which won seven Academy Awards® including Best Picture and Best Director.

In addition to appearing in memorable roles in “JFK,” “The Untouchables” and “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves,” he re-teamed with his “Bull Durham” director Ron Shelton for the hit feature “Tin Cup.”

Costner also starred in “Thirteen Days,” successfully collaborating again with his “No Way Out” director Roger Donaldson. His other film credits include “For Love of the Game,” “The War,” “3000 Miles to Graceland,” “Dragonfly” and “The Postman,” his second directing effort.

Kevin Costner last directed the box-office hit and critically acclaimed film “Open Range,” which he also co-starred in alongside Robert Duvall and Annette Bening.

Costner co-starred with Joan Allen in the dramatic film “The Upside of Anger”; opposite Jennifer Aniston in “Rumor Has It...” directed by Rob Reiner for Warner Bros.; “The Guardian,” an action drama for Touchstone Pictures, in which he portrayed a Coast Guard rescue swimmer; the thriller “Mr. Brooks”; and he starred in Touchstone Pictures’ political comedy “Swing Vote.”

Costner also starred in the History Channel’s record-setting miniseries “Hatfields and McCoys,” in which he portrayed “Devil” Anse Hatfield, the patriarch of the famed clan, opposite Bill Paxton’s Randall McCoy. He also served as a producer of the series, which received 16 Emmy® Award nominations, and won the Emmy for Best Actor in a Mini-series or Movie. He also received Golden Globe® and Screen Actors Guild® Awards for his performance.

Most recently Costner was seen in the Warner Bros. Superman reboot, “Man of Steel,” as the superhero’s father Jonathan Kent; co-starred with Chris Pine in “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit,” Paramount Pictures’ revival of the Tom Clancy franchise; and starred in the spy thriller “3 Days to Kill” for Relativity Media and the football-inspired “Draft Day,” directed by Ivan Reitman. He will next be seen in the drama “Black or White,” which he produced and co-stars with Octavia Spencer.

Costner is also producing and lending his voice to “The Explorers Guild,” an animated series based on a collection of gothic stories that follows a group of Victorian-era adventurers as they travel to the darkest corners of the map.

When Costner is not working on films, he sings lead vocals and plays lead guitar in his band, Modern West, and can be seen playing venues across the country. The band recently recorded a collection of songs from and inspired by “Hatfields & McCoys.” Featuring the song “These Hills,” the album is entitled “Famous for Killing Each Other.” The band’s song “The Angels Came Down” from their album “Turn It On” was recently adopted by



the Gold Star Moms and Gold Star Wives organizations, which support the mothers, wives and families of fallen soldiers.

MARIA BELLO (Cheryl White) has captivated audiences with her many diverse roles in such films as “The Cooler” with William H. Macy (Golden Globe® and SAG Award® nominations); David Cronenberg’s “A History of Violence” (New York Film Critics win and Golden Globe nomination) opposite Viggo Mortenson and Ed Harris; Oliver Stone’s “World Trade Center”; and more recently, “Prisoners” opposite Hugh Jackman; and Paul Haggis’ “Third Person.”

Bello has also appeared with Adam Sandler in “Grown Ups” and “Grown Ups 2,” the John Wells drama “The Company Men” and in “Abduction,” starring Taylor Lautner. Upcoming films include the James Wan thriller, “Demonic,” “Bravetown” with Laura Dern and Josh Duhamel, and “Max Steel” with Andy Garcia.

Next spring, Dey Street Books, an imprint of HarperCollins, will publish “Whatever... Love is Love: A New Way of Talking About Family and Partnership,” in which Bello expands on her news-making “Coming Out as Modern Family” column which ran in The New York Times last year. The book will explore themes and ideas surrounding family, partnership, sexuality and spirituality. Bello will weave together stories of family, love, sex and faith, chronicling the lessons of her life with honesty and courage.

Bello’s other film credits include: “Thank You for Smoking,” “The Jane Austen Book Club,” “The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor,” “Towelhead,” “The Yellow Handkerchief,” “Auto Focus,” “Beautiful Boy” opposite Michael Sheen, “Permanent Midnight” with Ben Stiller, “Payback” with Mel Gibson, “Flicka” opposite Tim McGraw, Bruce Paltrow’s “Duets,” Jerry Bruckheimer’s “Coyote Ugly,” “Secret Window” with Johnny Depp, “Silver City” with Chris Cooper and “Assault on Precinct 13” with Ethan Hawke.

No stranger to the small screen, Bello most recently starred in the Lifetime TV movie “Big Driver,” based on the Stephen King short story. She also starred as detective Jane Timoney in the NBC series “Prime Suspect,” and for one season in the role of passionate and headstrong pediatrician Dr. Anna Del Amico in NBC’s critically acclaimed series “ER.”

Bello is also an internationally renowned activist and one of the world’s most powerful voices for social justice and women’s rights around the world, with a special focus on Haiti. She is the co-founder of We Advance, a women’s movement and NGO based in Cite Soleil, which advocates for women throughout the country to have full political, economic and social participation.

Since 2008, Bello has worked in Haiti with Artists for Peace and Justice and Femmes en Democratie, where she raised funds and produced a women’s media campaign for the elections in 2010, and spearheaded the opening of a women’s clinic in the Petionville Camp immediately following the earthquake. Bello is also a member of the Clinton Global Initiative and works on gender policy within the Haiti Network. She has been named a Vital Voices Global Ambassador for women and participated in the first-ever Vital Voices/Bank of America International Women’s Conference in Haiti.

Bello speaks around the world on social impact investing, Haiti, and women’s rights. In 2012, she was a keynote speaker at the State Department’s Forum on Impact Investing and was also awarded the Starkey Foundation’s “So the World May Hear” Award. She was named the Goodwill Ambassador for Women in Haiti and leads President Martelly’s Council for Investments in Haiti on a committee for women’s empowerment, social business and poverty alleviation with Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus.



Bello is currently speaking at TEDx and other venues in the world about the “new women’s revolution” and impact investing for women. Bello is also the founder of the new website We Advance University, which aims to connect and empower women in Haiti and throughout the world, and she is a partner in the company Socme Academy, which powers the site. Along with her Haitian colleagues, she is building the first women’s co-op bakery in Marigaux, Haiti.

She began her career as an activist at Villanova University, where she majored in Peace and Justice Education and worked at the Women’s Law Project in Philadelphia. She started her first NGO, the DreamYard Drama Project in Harlem in 1997. In 2009, Bello was voted one of Variety’s Most Powerful Women in Hollywood for her activism with women in Darfur.

MORGAN SAYLOR (Julie White) is best known for her role on Showtime’s Emmy® Award-winning drama series, “Homeland.”

Saylor recently completed shooting the independent film, “White Girl,” which was written and directed by Elizabeth Wood and produced by Christine Vachon. This provocative film is based on a true story and follows two girls who are kicked out of their college dorm for smoking marijuana. When they are forced to move to the ‘hood, one of the girls (Saylor) falls in love with her neighbor. When he is arrested, she must make a difficult decision to save him from going to prison for life.

This summer, Saylor made her off-Broadway debut at the Manhattan Theatre Club in the 1970s-set play, “When We Were Young and Unafraid” by Sarah Treem. The show starred Cherry Jones as a woman who has turned her bed-and-breakfast into a refuge for distressed women. Saylor played the daughter of Ms. Jones’ character, who was influenced by the arrival of a young runaway.

Saylor also starred opposite Judy Greer and Liv Tyler in photographer Carter Smith’s feature film, “Jamie Marks Is Dead,” which premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival and was released this fall. Based on the novel “One for Sorrow,” the film is about a teenage boy’s coming-of-age that begins with a shocking murder and ends with a reason to hope.

Saylor has been acting professionally since age 11. Her film credits include “Cirque du Freak: The Vampire’s Assistant” with John C. Reilly and Josh Hutcherson, “The Greening of Whitney Brown” with Brooke Shields and “Father of Invention” with Kevin Spacey, Camilla Belle and Heather Graham.

Saylor was born in Chicago and raised in Georgia. She now resides in New York and enjoys rock climbing in her free time.

Most recently, **MARTHA HIGAREDA (Lupe)** starred in the Mexican comedy “Cásese Quien Pueda,” aka “Marry Me If You Can,” which she also wrote and produced. The film opened No. 1 in Latin America on Valentine’s Day beating out “RoboCop” and “The Lego Movie” and remained in that position for eight weeks.

Last year, Higareda received the Best Actress/Television Imagen Award for her role in Lifetime Television’s “Lies in Plain Sight.” She is well known for her work in Mexico, starring in “Niñas Mal,” directed by Fernando Sariñana, and “Borderland,” directed by Zev Berman. Following, she starred in Fox’s “Street Kings” opposite Keanu Reeves, Hugh Laurie and Forest Whitaker, and in Universal’s prequel “Smokin’ Aces 2: Assassins’ Ball” as a deadly female assassin.



Recently, she wrapped production on “Mariachi Gringo,” starring opposite Shawn Ashmore for director Tom Gustafson. Higareda is also starring in the Sony Television/Teleset crime series “El Mariachi,” created by Robert Rodriguez. She is currently writing, producing and starring in “Who’s on Top?” which will be released through Pantelion.

MICHAEL AGUERO (Damacio Diaz) had to overcome many adversities in his young life. He was born in Bakersfield, California, and grew up without a mother or father. He was raised by his grandmother and was emancipated at age 14. At 15 he lived on his own and fell into a life of gangs and hanging with the wrong crowd. After being held at gunpoint four times, he realized that this was not the life for him and decided to try to turn around his life.

Determined to become a positive influence in his younger brothers Jonathan and Joshua’s lives, he joined dance and became more social in high school. Hearing about an open call for a film being shot in his local town, he went to audition, but after three auditions he never heard back.

Graduating early, Aguero moved to Nebraska at age 18 to be able to support his newborn son Michael Aguero Jr. After eight months in Nebraska, Aguero moved back to Bakersfield and that’s when he received a phone call saying he got the job on the feature film he auditioned for a year before—“McFarland, USA.” Now with a major credit under his belt, Aguero is determined to become a triple threat in the entertainment business.

SERGIO AVELAR (Victor Puentes) has never acted before. “McFarland, USA” marks his motion-picture debut. Avelar, also a McFarland native, is a former runner and member of the McFarland Track Club.

HECTOR DURAN (Johnny Sameniego) is a spunky young actor who is getting his big break in “McFarland, USA.” Duran plays Johnny Sameniego, the tiny but quick member of the track team coached by Kevin Costner in the film. An avid runner, Duran was delighted to receive a role that allowed him to show his athletic side.

Previously, Duran starred alongside Hollywood heavyweights Rosanne Barr and John Goodman as a series regular on the NBC pilot “Downwardly Mobile”. He also acted in a variety of series, including “Shameless,” “Maron” and more.

A Los Angeles native, Duran started acting when he was just 9 years old. Growing up with a love for theater, he developed a desire to entertain at a young age. When he is not acting, Duran enjoys music, breakdancing and spending time with his family and friends.

RAFAEL MARTINEZ (David Diaz) makes his motion-picture debut in “McFarland, USA.” Coming from humble beginnings, Martinez was born and raised in Panorama City, California. He took interest in acting at 8 years old after watching his favorite movie, “Spy Kids.” Recognizing his passion and despite the financial sacrifice, his parents enrolled him in a local acting studio.

Shy and focused, Martinez was often bullied by his peers. However, he found solace in films, gaining an appreciation for how good storytelling and cinema can empower people through times of distress. Martinez now looks forward to making films that inspire, entertain and ultimately give hope to people all around the world—while also honoring his family who instilled in him the value of hard work and family.



His additional credits include two short films, “Contrapelo,” the story of a proud Mexican barber forced to shave the leader of a drug cartel that is destroying his country; and “Vicious,” an unflinching look, through the eyes of those affected, at the tragic cycle of gang violence perpetuated over the course of one brutal and heartbreaking night.

JOHNNY ORTIZ (Jose Cardenas) is an American-born actor whose parents hail from Mexico and Guatemala. At age 11, he took an interest in acting and began studying with his mentor and teacher, Edward Padilla, at Casa 0101 Theater, where he last starred in its critically acclaimed production, “Light in the Darkness.” He has appeared in TV commercials, TV shows and independent films. He was signed by his manager, Patch Mackenzie, when she saw him in “Nani,” an AFI short that won Best Student Film at the USA Film Festival. His most recent credits include a series lead role in the new ABC drama “American Crime,” shot in Austin, Texas, and produced and directed by John Ridley, an Oscar® winner for “12 Years a Slave.” The show is scheduled to air March 5, 2015. When not on the set, Ortiz continues his education by working on a college degree in the Los Angeles area. As a bit of interesting trivia, Ortiz speaks basic Chinese and Russian. Ortiz is also quite the athlete and enjoys hip-hop and sports such as rock climbing, running (long-distance and sprint), shooting (rifle and revolver), skateboard (street/stunts), soccer, archery, baseball, basketball, billiards, boxing, cycling, diving, football, Frisbee, gymnastics, handball, ice skating and jump rope. Martial arts include jujitsu, tae kwon do, karate, kung fu and kickboxing. He also plays the drums and flute.

Ortiz is also known for his good heart and always giving back to his community by acting as a role model, working with kids and inspiring them to follow their dreams. He also supports Wolf Connection, a group in Acton, California, that rescues wolves that have been tortured and abandoned, and then rehabilitates them into therapy dogs for at-risk, inner-city kids.

Born in Texas, **CARLOS PRATTS (Thomas Valles)** is an actor who first received critical notice for his portrayal of Gus Ruiz (Demian Bichir’s son) on Season 1 of FX’s “The Bridge.” Prior to that he appeared in such films as “Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones,” the short film “Out of the Fire” and “Coyote.” He guest-starred on series such as “Justified,” “Southland” and “Prime Suspect.” This is his first leading role.

RAMIRO RODRIGUEZ (Danny Diaz), who is from McFarland, has never acted before. “McFarland, USA” marks his motion-picture debut.

DANNY MORA (Sammy) started his career in the grape fields of Fresno, California. A farmworker’s dream and a Greyhound bus brought him to Hollywood. Mora is a comedian, actor and writer whose first love is theater. Standup comedy is a passion; he toured Korea as a comic for the U.S. Army from 1995 to 2002.

Mora portrayed Fidel Castro in the world premiere of “The Boys of Mariel” at the Lillian Theatre and directed Lydia Nicole’s one-woman off-Broadway show “Calling Up Papi.” He is a founding member of the WGA’s Latino Writers Committee and earned his union card as a staff writer on “Laverne & Shirley.” Graduates of Mora’s sitcom boot camp include Josefina Lopez, Luisa Leschin, Ruth Livier and Jessica Lopez.

Mora’s television work started with a recurring role on NBC’s hit comedy “Chico and the Man,” followed by seven TV pilots, three series and countless episodic guest appearances, from “Hill Street Blues” to “George Lopez,”

including contemporary cable hits “Southland” and “Shameless.” His credits range from telefilms to feature films, including the Hallmark Hall of Fame production “Stones for Ybarra,” Lifetime’s “We Have Your Husband,” the Lionsgate thriller “The Eye” with Jessica Alba and the martial arts favorite, “Dragon Eyes.” His most recent work includes a recurring role as an aging ‘veterano’ gangster for the Paramount web series, “Chop Shop.”

Currently Mora continues to mentor writers and actors and is a well-respected acting coach among his peers. His current client list includes actors William Stanford Davis, Jay Hernandez, and newcomers Cole Ewing and Sierra McCormick.

VALENTE RODRIGUEZ (Principal Camillo) is widely recognized for his role as Ernie in the hit series, “George Lopez.” He has also appeared in many Hollywood blockbusters, including “Volcano,” “Deep Blue Sea,” “Erin Brockovich,” “The Ugly Truth” and “It’s Complicated.” Other films include the comedy “Gone Hollywood” and the romantic comedy “The Little Match Makers.”

A versatile actor and comedian who grew up in Texas, Rodriguez attended the University of Texas-Pan American. Upon graduation, the theater department head gave him \$2,000 out of her own pocket so that he could go to Los Angeles to become a professional actor.

VANESSA MARTINEZ (Maria Marsol) began her career in Dallas, Texas, at the age of 11. Her first big break came after a statewide casting call for the Emmy®-nominated miniseries, “Streets of Laredo,” where she was cast as Teresa Garza, a young and spirited blind girl.

John Sayles cast her as the Young Pilar in his Academy Award®-nominated film “Lone Star.” From there, Sayles wrote the role of Noelle for her in his award-winning film “Limbo,” for which she was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actress. She also appeared in Sayles’ “Casa de los Babys” and his most recent film, “Go for Sisters.”

Martinez has continued her work with prestigious directors, such as Gavin O’Connor in “Warrior,” opposite Tom Hardy.

For 30 years, **CHRIS ELLIS (Coach Jenks)** has maintained a consistent career as a character actor in film and television, and has had the good fortune to assay significant roles in “My Cousin Vinny,” “Apollo 13,” “That Thing You Do!,” “October Sky,” “Armageddon,” “Catch Me If You Can,” “The Dark Knight Rises,” and a comprehensive string of doctor shows, lawyer shows and forensic shows on television.

In an impressive 18-year career, **DIANA MARIA RIVA (Señora Diaz)** has established herself as a dominant force in television, film and theater. In 2013, she wrapped “Love & Mercy” with Elizabeth Banks and John Cusack and also had a supporting role in the critically acclaimed “Short Term 12.” In 2010, she starred opposite America Ferrera in Fox Searchlight’s “Our Family Wedding,” also starring Carlos Mencia and Forest Whitaker.

Other notable film credits include “17 Again,” “What Women Want,” “Employee of the Month,” “Chasing Papi” and “The Third Wheel,” among others.



On the television side, Riva was most recently seen in FX's "Saint George" with comedian George Lopez. She continues to recur on FX's "The Bridge," starring Diane Kruger, playing the role of Kitty Conchas. In the 2010 Fox dramedy "The Good Guys" with Bradley Whitford and Colin Hanks, she played the duo's boss, Lt. Anna Ruiz.

Riva received rave reviews in the original Lifetime drama series "Side Order of Life," where she played Vivy Porter, a feisty outspoken woman who refuses to allow her diagnosis of cancer get the best of her. The Hollywood Reporter singled her out in a Spotlight piece as a front-runner leading up to the Golden Globe® nominations.

Riva was first discovered by ABC Studios. They quickly signed her to a holding deal and placed her as a series regular in their half-hour comedy "Common Law." Though the show was short-lived, Riva parlayed her experience into an impressive small screen resume. She starred as Kim Delaney's colorful and confident office manager on the ABC/Steven Bochco series "Philly." She also co-starred on the long-running hit sitcom "Sabrina, the Teenage Witch" as Annie, Sabrina's boss at Heat Magazine. Prior to her dynamic role on "Philly," Riva had already made quite a name for herself as part of the Bochco family—having appeared in recurring roles on "City of Angels" and "NYPD Blue," as well as doing guest-star work on "Murder One." She also recurred on such prominent series as "Everybody Loves Raymond" "The West Wing," "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip," "Less Than Perfect," "The Hughleys" and "Family Law," as well as "The Drew Carey Show," "Strong Medicine," "The X-Files," "The Pretender," "Party of Five," "The Ghost Whisperer" and "In Plain Sight."

Riva was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, with her native roots going back to the Dominican Republic. Her upbringing, surrounded by strong Latin women, encouraged her to be independent and to follow her heart wherever it led her. It in fact led her to an M.F.A. in Theater Performance from the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and a life devoted to entertainment. While appearing in the Michael Weller play "Help," she had the opportunity to travel with the show to Los Angeles. There, Riva was promptly discovered by an agent and received the prestigious development deal from ABC. Even after landing her first television lead on "Common Law," she continued to devote time to her love of the stage by performing her one-woman show "Besame Mucho....O.K. That's Enough," a semi-autobiographical work about the perspectives of five women on the journey of love, marriage and divorce in the Latino culture.

When not hard at work, Riva dedicates her time to her family. She is enthusiastic about instilling the traditions of her upbringing in her children. She and her family currently reside in Los Angeles.

After hearing that she resembles Dakota Fanning throughout the first five years of her life, **ELSIE FISHER (Jamie White)** decided she wanted to be an actress. With her parents' blessing, she took the plunge and, in the very first month of her career, was cast as the voice of Agnes in "Despicable Me." Since doing the film, Fisher went on to lend her voice to the sequel, "Despicable Me 2" and has made appearances in several national commercials and on the television shows "Medium," "Mike & Molly" and "Raising Hope." She also lent her voice to the animated series "Masha and the Bear" and played a supporting role in the indie feature "Dirty Girl" opposite Juno Temple.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

NIKI CARO (Director) has directed three actresses to Oscar® nominations—Keisha Castle-Hughes and Charlize Theron earned Best Actress nods for their work in “Whale Rider” and “North Country,” respectively, and Frances McDormand was also nominated for “North Country” as Best Supporting Actress.

Born in Wellington, New Zealand, Niki Caro received a B.F.A. at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland and a postgraduate degree in film from Swinburne in Melbourne. She began her career doing TV commercials for companies such as New Zealand Land Transport Safety Authority, Nike and Tower Insurance. Her short film, “Sure to Rise” (1994), was nominated for a Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

She followed that up with the television drama “The Summer the Queen Came,” which received best writer and best director nominations at the 1994 New Zealand Film and Television Awards. Her 1996 short film “Footage” was an Official Selection at the Venice Film Festival.

Caro’s first feature, “Memory & Desire” (1997), was in the lineup at the Cannes Film Festival and won a Special Jury Prize at the New Zealand Film Awards. She went on to write and direct the one-hour TV drama “Plain Tastes” and a half-hour episode of the drama series “True Life Stories.”

But it was her second feature film, “Whale Rider” (2002), which won Caro worldwide acclaim. Caro adapted the screenplay from Maori author Witi Ihimaera’s acclaimed novel of the same name. She also directed the film, which became New Zealand’s most financially successful movie and one of its most acclaimed. Caro and “Whale Rider” have won and/or been nominated for over 50 international awards, including audience awards at prestigious international film festivals such as Toronto, Sundance, Rotterdam, San Francisco, Seattle, Maui and Lake Placid.

“North Country” (2005), starring Charlize Theron, Frances McDormand, Woody Harrelson, Jeremy Renner, Sissy Spacek, Sean Bean, Michelle Monaghan and Richard Jenkins, marked the first film Caro shot in the United States and the first feature she had not written herself.

Other features include “A Heavenly Vintage,” which reunited her with Keisha Castle-Hughes, the star of “Whale Rider,” and also starred Jérémie Renier in the story of a peasant winemaker who endeavors to make the perfect vintage, set in 19th century France.

Mayhem Pictures, founded by **MARK CIARDI (Producer)** and **GORDON GRAY (Producer)**, has established an indelible brand of quality entertainment with broad appeal. The company’s first film, “The Rookie” (2002), starring Dennis Quaid, was a critical and commercial success and more feature films followed: “Miracle” (2004), starring Kurt Russell, and “Invincible,” starring Mark Wahlberg. All three were distributed through Walt Disney Pictures, where the company has enjoyed an overall deal for the past 12 years.

Mayhem’s thriving collaboration with Walt Disney Studios includes “The Game Plan,” the hit family comedy, starring Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson, which opened at No. 1 for two consecutive weeks at the domestic box office and grossed nearly \$148 million worldwide.

Mayhem also produced Walt Disney Pictures’ “Secretariat,” which opened in October 2010 to commercial and critical success. The film grossed nearly \$60 million in domestic box office and it earned the noteworthy



distinction of being the top-holding film that year. Mayhem's most recent film, Disney's "Million Dollar Arm," stars Jon Hamm and Alan Arkin and was directed by Craig Gillespie and written by Thomas McCarthy.

The company is also producing its first independent movie, "Fallen," based on Lauren Kate's popular YA books. Directed by Scott Hicks ("Shine"), "Fallen" stars Jeremy Irvine ("War Horse") and Addison Timlin ("Californication," "Odd Thomas").

Mayhem also made its first foray into television with the award-winning documentary "Big Shot," directed by Kevin Connolly. "Big Shot" aired as part of ESPN's acclaimed "30 for 30" series in the fall of 2013.

Both Ciardi and Gray are members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

CHRISTOPHER CLEVELAND (Screenplay by) was the founder and artistic director of the Redwood Conservatory Theatre, where he directed acclaimed productions ranging from Sophocles to Mamet. He studied film at Art Center College of Design. His awards and nominations include the Humanitas Prize, the Black Reel Award, the Movieguide Award and the ESPY Award.

Cleveland has collaborated with such Oscar®-winning artists as Michael Mann, Robert De Niro, Robert Zemeckis, Denzel Washington, John Badham, Barbra Streisand, Christian Bale, Norman Jewison, Taylor Hackford, Jeffrey Katzenberg, William Friedkin, Jerry Bruckheimer, John Malkovich, Isabelle Huppert, Joel Surnow, Martin Campbell, Richard and Lili Zanuck and Queen Latifah. His films include Jerry Bruckheimer's "Glory Road" and "The Hurricane," for which Denzel Washington won the Golden Globe®, as well as the upcoming movie "Bessie" for HBO, starring Queen Latifah.

In addition to writing, Cleveland has also directed several music videos for such artists as Steve Earle, and is directing a feature next summer.

BETTINA GILOIS (Screenplay by) is an award-winning screenwriter and author, whose nominations and awards include the Humanitas Prize, the Black Reel Award, the Movieguide Award and the ESPY Award. After earning a degree in art history at Columbia University and working at Andy Warhol's Factory, she began her writing career with Joel Silver and Warner Bros. Gilois has collaborated with such notable artists and producers as Jerry Bruckheimer, Joel Surnow, Richard and Lili Zanuck, Queen Latifah, James Coburn, Norman Jewison, Michael Mann, Martin Campbell, Kevin Costner, and Christian Bale. Her films include Jerry Bruckheimer's "Glory Road," also "The Hurricane," for which Denzel Washington won the Golden Globe®, and "The Mists of Avalon" with Anjelica Huston, as well as the movie upcoming "Bessie" for HBO, starring Queen Latifah.

In addition to writing screenplays, Gilois has authored several books. Three of her book projects are being made into movies. She also writes for the Huffington Post in the Arts and Culture section.

GRANT THOMPSON (Screenplay by) began his career as an actor, appearing in over 10 feature films, 15 television series and 25 national commercials (including being named America's Favorite Commercial Star by ABC for his work in Geico's Tiny House campaign). The Florida native and Harvard graduate eventually turned to screenwriting and producing.



As a feature writer, Thompson has eight films in various stages of development with studios and/or producers, including Disney's "Electric Boy Genius," "Spitfire" at Lionsgate, "Mourning Glory" at Lionsgate, "Bad Dog" at Participant and "Start," an indie with Mark Johnson and Mayhem. As a television writer, he recently sold a one-hour drama to CBS and Sony with Neal Moritz's Original Film producing. As a video game creator, Thompson worked with Jerry Bruckheimer Games to develop original titles that meshed cutting-edge gameplay with improved stories and characters consistent with the Bruckheimer brand.

Based in Los Angeles, Thompson recently wrapped up a stint as the Director of Content for the Start Channel—a collaboration between IGN Entertainment and YouTube.

MARIO ISCOVICH (Executive Producer) is a veteran filmmaker who most recently served as executive producer of "You Again," "Race to Witch Mountain" and "Sky High." He is currently in an overall deal at Disney and has several projects in development.

After entering the film business as a personal assistant to movie great Steve McQueen, he moved into filmmaking as a production consultant on "The Godfather: Part II" and "The Domino Principle" and served as associate producer on "The Runner Stumbles." He worked as location manager on such films as "Jinxed!," "2010," "Lost in America," "Nothing in Common," "Overboard," "The Presidio" and "Chances Are" before becoming a producer on such films as "Pretty Woman," "The Rocketeer," "Sister Act," "What's Love Got to Do With It," "Sister Act II: Back in the Habit," "Mulholland Falls," "Dear God," "George of the Jungle," "Deep Rising," "The Other Sister," "Runaway Bride," "The Princess Diaries," "Freaky Friday" and "Raising Helen."

Iscoviich was born in Argentina and came to America with his parents.

MARY MARTIN (Executive Producer) is the head of blackbird fly entertainment, which specializes in adapting true stories for feature films and television, as well as books. Most recently she served as an executive producer on Lifetime Entertainment Television's "Abducted: The Carlina White Story" with Sherri Shepherd and Kiki Palmer, which won the 2013 Image Award for Outstanding Writing in a Motion Picture as well as being nominated for the Humanitas Prize.

That same year Martin was pleased to serve in the same capacity on Hallmark Hall of Fame's "Firelight" (ABC), which won Cuba Gooding, Jr. the Image Award for Outstanding Actor in a Television Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special and went on to garner the Humanitas Prize for television in the 90-minute category.

Martin is an alumna of UCSD and earned her M.F.A. from UCLA's Producing Program.

ADAM ARKAPAW (Director of Photography) is a recognized talent best known for his work on the acclaimed feature "Animal Kingdom," for which he received an Australian Film Institute Award nomination and won Best Cinematography Debut at Camerimage. Other films include "Lore" and "The Snowtown Murders," as well as the upcoming "Macbeth," starring Michael Fassbender. His television work includes Jane Campion's atmospheric miniseries "Top of the Lake," for which he won the Emmy® for Outstanding Cinematography, as well as the lauded HBO series "True Detective."

Arkapaw has photographed several short films and documentaries, including the Cannes Jury Prize-winning



short film “Jerrycan,” and “I Love Sarah Jane,” which won major awards at the Arizona International Film Festival, Nashville Film Festival and Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival.

His 2002 documentary credit, “Desiree,” was named winner of the Kodak Award for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography and also screened in official competition at the 2003 Tribeca Film Festival followed by an award for Best Cinematographer at the 2006 Hole Film Festival (USA) for his work on the Australian Film Institute-nominated “End of Town.”

In addition to his film credits, Arkapaw has shot numerous high-profile music videos along with television commercials for companies such as Kleenex, Maggi, Nintendo and Nescafé and was also mentored, for a period, by renowned cinematographer Andrew Lesnie on the second and third films of director Peter Jackson’s “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy.

RICHARD HOOVER (Production Designer) has designed major projects for the stage and screen. He has twice worked with director Brian Helgeland, on the biopic “42” and the thriller “Payback.” His list of film credits also includes “Soul Men,” “Henry Poole Is Here,” “North Country,” “The Mothman Prophecies,” “Girl, Interrupted,” “Cradle Will Rock,” “Apt Pupil” and the Tim Robbins-directed films “Dead Man Walking” and “Bob Roberts.”

For the small screen, Hoover earned an Emmy® nomination and won an Art Directors Guild (ADG) Award for the telefilm “Live from Baghdad.” He received his second Emmy nomination for the acclaimed HBO biopic “Temple Grandin.” Most recently, he served as the production designer on the HBO series “The Newsroom,” for which he garnered another ADG Award nomination. His television work also includes such long-form projects as “Lackawanna Blues,” “The Hamburg Cell,” “Fail Safe,” “Heat Wave” and “Family of Spies,” the pilot of HBO’s “Entourage,” and David Lynch’s innovative series “Twin Peaks.”

Hoover, who has also designed extensively for the stage, won Tony® and Drama Desk Awards for his work on Trevor Nunn’s production of Tennessee Williams’ “Not About Nightingales.” He also won an Evening Standard Award and received Olivier and London Critics Circle Award nominations for the play’s West End presentation at the Royal National Theatre. He has since received two more Drama Desk Award nominations, for “Bat Boy: The Musical” and the 2004 Broadway revival of Arthur Miller’s “After the Fall.” In all, Hoover has designed more than 75 productions, including projects for the stages of New York’s Public Theater, Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre, Minneapolis’ Guthrie Theater, and Los Angeles’ Mark Taper Forum, among others.

New Zealander **DAVID COULSON (Editor)** has worked with Niki Caro three times; first on the Oscar®-nominated film “Whale Rider,” next on “North Country” and most recently on “A Heavenly Vintage.” Coulson has won the New Zealand Film and Television Best Editing Award three times—once for Leon Narbey’s film “The Footstep Man” and the others for “Illustrious Energy” and “Broken English,” which also received a Best Editing Award at the Asia Pacific Film Festival. He was also a finalist for Best Editing on “Whale Rider,” “User Friendly” and “Desperate Remedies” (selected for Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival and winner of Best Picture at the Kiev International Film Festival).

His television work includes “Pacific 3-2-1-Zero,” which received Best Editing (Television) at the NZ Film and TV Awards and Best Work Conceived for the Camera at the Midem Awards in Cannes; and “Fortitude,” an episode of the Kurt Vonnegut’s “Monkey House” series, which won three CableACE Awards.



Coulson has edited many short films. Three have been nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, including the recent "Night Shift," which has won awards in the U.S. and Hong Kong; and "Manurewa," which won a Crystal Bear at the Berlin Film Festival. Others include "Kitchen Sink," winner of Best Short Film at the Sydney Film Festival among many other awards; "Rushes," winner of the Silver Plaque at the Chicago Film Festival; "Avondale Dogs," Best Short Film winner at the Chicago, Melbourne and Dresden Film Festivals, and the NZ Film and TV Awards.

Coulson also edited several drama series and documentaries, including "Behind Closed Doors," which won the Blue Ribbon Award at the American Film and TV Festival, New York. He has also received the NZ Advertising Gold, Silver and Bronze Axis Awards for his television commercials.

SOPHIE de RAKOFF (COSTUME DESIGNER) was born and raised in London and moved to New York in 1990. When she first arrived in the States, she made her mark in the world of journalism as a features writer for Paper Magazine, and as a contributor to such illustrious publications as Vogue, Detour, Dazed and Confused, and Vibe.

In 1993, she headed west to Los Angeles where she continued her work for Paper, serving as a West Coast contributor and writing six cover stories. During this time, she began to switch tracks and found success working in the music industry as a fashion stylist.

Her newfound enthusiasm for costume design led her to her first feature film, "Speed of Life," in 1999. But it was in 2001, when she designed the contemporary classic "Legally Blonde," that de Rakoff truly solidified herself as one of the industry's key players. The film led to numerous and continuing accolades, as well as an ongoing collaboration with actress Reese Witherspoon. To date, the two have worked on six films together, most recently "This Means War," co-starring Chris Pine and Tom Hardy. Her other notable film credits include "In Her Shoes," "Fever Pitch," "Shall We Dance," "Legally Blonde 2: Red, White & Blonde" and "Sweet Home Alabama."

Recent projects include the highly stylized "Runner Runner," starring Justin Timberlake and Ben Affleck; and soon-to-be-released "Imagine," starring Al Pacino. Beyond film, de Rakoff has designed countless music videos and commercials for such clients as Jeep, Reebok, Visa, Diet Coke, Corvette and ESPN.

Additionally, she continues to expand her voice in the world of style and design, serving as contributor to the Huffington Post's style site, Stylist. Over the years, her peers, the press, and the industry have consistently recognized de Rakoff for her work. She has been nominated twice by the Costume Designer's Guild for Excellence in Contemporary Film, and in 2005 was honored by Premiere Magazine and AMC as one of that year's "Women in Hollywood" recipients. Her work on "Legally Blonde" was featured in Deborah Nadoolman Landis' book, "Dressed: A Century of Hollywood Costume Design" and her design for the "Legally Blonde" iconic Jackie O costume was honored as part of London's Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition, "Hollywood Costumes."

She is also the curator of two programs for the Los Angeles Film Festival: the Costume Design Program, entering its third year in 2015, and the Fine Art Program. De Rakoff is married with a son and lives in Los Angeles.

Oscar® and Academy Award® are the registered trademarks and service marks of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.
Screen Actors Guild Award® and SAG Award® are the registered trademarks and service marks of Screen Actors Guild™.
Emmy® is the trademark property of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.
Golden Globe® is the registered trademark and service mark of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.
Tony Award® is a registered trademark and service mark of The American Theatre Wing.

GRAMMY® and the gramophone logo are registered trademarks of The Recording Academy® and are used under license. ©2011 The Recording Academy®.

