



Photos provided
Director and producer Justin Barber speaks with cast members Hans Willar and Werner Riedel during filming of "The Wednesday Morning Breakfast Club." The film that was shot in St. Joseph will be shown Friday at the Box Factory for the Arts.

Family values

Movie by St. Joseph siblings kicks off Box Factory series

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
HP Features Writer

ST. JOSEPH — At the time, moving across the state to help take care of their elderly grandparents didn't sound like an uplifting experience for siblings Justin and Amanda Barber.

In 2000, their grandmother, Francis Barber, had a debilitating stroke prompting the move from Ypsilanti to Kalamazoo. By year's end she was gone. The young siblings stayed in Kalamazoo for the next 10 years with their grieving and sometimes cantankerous grandfather, Joe Barber.

"Those years were particularly informative to my sister and I," says Justin Barber, who now lives in St. Joseph. "Even

though there was an age barrier initially and he could be grumpy, that eventually broke down and we heard his stories and have been able to benefit from his experience and his wisdom. Those experiences meant a lot to us. A lot of that really drove us to make this film."

The film is "The Wednesday Morning Breakfast Club," a 49-minute first feature from Duke Street Productions, which will be shown tonight at the Berrien Center Bible Church and again Friday at Box Factory for the Arts as the opener in its 2013-14 First Friday Film Series. The Box Factory screening will be

followed by a question-and-answer session with the filmmakers.

Written by Amanda Barber, 28, and directed and produced by Justin Barber, 25, the film tells the story of Megan (Stacey Bradshaw), a young, newly hired waitress as she gets to know a group of three eccentric old-timers who come into Thornton's Hometown Café every Wednesday morning. There's the old German, Heinrich Roth (Werner

Riedel); Nathan Goldwin (Hans Willar), who has dementia; and Rickey Lombardo (David Maysick), who enjoys complaining.

Despite her initial impressions, Megan soon befriends the three men and as they begin to open up, the impact of their life stories reaches well beyond the café's walls.

Bradshaw, who met Justin

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Barber at the San Antonio Christian Film Festival, lives in Virginia. The rest of the cast, including David Cade of Watervliet, who plays café owner Virgil, is all local.

"I got the story idea from my dad," says Amanda Barber, who also portrays Martha, a snide waitress who works alongside Megan in the film. "He had the idea about some old guys who come into a restaurant the same day and same time and just talk about their life experiences. We've all seen guys like that at restaurants. I didn't quite know what to do with it so it sat for a few years."

Amanda Barber returned to her father's idea with her brother's renewed interest in filmmaking. Although Justin Barber had always been interested in movies, he stepped away from any industry pursuits when he realized he was more interested in being a filmmaker than in the films themselves.

"My initial interests were more about fame and glory. Those ambitions were pretty immature," says Justin Barber, who works full time as a nurse in the cardiac unit at Lakeland Regional Medical Center. "Then I started to see some good Christian films like 'Courageous' and that inspired me to look beyond what was coming out of Hollywood."

In 2008, Barber met photographer Seth Haley, 23, who also had an interest in filmmaking. They began experimenting with a few shorts, until Barber approached his sister about writing a screenplay.

"Justin said, 'We need a script and you need to write something,'" Amanda Barber says. "I've written a novel and a lot of short stories, but the more I thought about it I kept coming back to my dad's idea. It was actually one of the fastest things I've written. I wrote it in a couple of months."

Since the restaurant plays such a key role in the film, the Barbers wanted to find the perfect spot to shoot, that's when Justin Barber spotted Thornton's Hometown Café.

"We were going to shoot it at a friend's restaurant but it was more modern and I really wanted an old diner feel," Justin Barber says. "I happened to drive by Thornton's and it caught my eye. I walked in and started talking to Kathy Thornton. I gave her the whole script to read and she said this is

IF YOU GO

► **WHAT:** "The Wednesday Morning Breakfast Club" First Friday Film Series screening and Q&A with the filmmakers

► **WHEN:** 7 p.m. Friday

► **WHERE:** Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph

► **HOW MUCH:** \$5

► **CONTACT:** 983-3688 or www.boxfactoryforthearts.org

► **ARTIST INFO:** www.facebook.com/dukestreetproductions

teacher at Coloma High School and at Watervliet's Grace Christian School, who now lives in Colorado Springs, to write the film's score.

Since the film's July premiere at The Chapel in St. Joseph, the Barbers have been planning additional screenings, selling copies of the film on DVD and submitting to festivals. Justin Barber has already submitted to the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, and the Ann Arbor Film Festival in Michigan. He also plans to submit to the San Antonio Christian Film Festival, among others.

So far the responses have been positive.

"The most important responses are the people who contact us and let us know how the film has affected their life," Justin Barber says. "One family decided they could do a better job honoring their elderly father in his final days and took him out of the nursing home and started caring for him in their home."

Although he considers "The Wednesday Morning Breakfast Club" a Christian film, he also is quick to point out that the story is universal.

"I may want to show films from the perspective of a Christian, but I also believe it shouldn't be a sermon," Justin Barber says. "You go to church to hear a sermon. You go to the movies to see a story. I believe through the intrinsic actions of people in the story you can share these messages that are uplifting and they don't have to be preachy."

As far as future projects, the siblings do expect to be working together again in the near future.

"What I write he tends to picture cinematically so it tends to work out," Amanda Barber says. "We make a pretty good team."

Email: jbonfiglio@TheHP.com

Twitter: @HPBorfiglio