

Schooling parents

SMMUSD opens its doors to the public to tout its campuses

BY MELODY HANATANI
Daily Press Staff Writer

WILMONT Caught between the top-notch selections of Lincoln Middle School and private schools like Archer and St. Monica for her young daughter to attend next year, Leticia Vidal is facing the kind of tough choice that many parents could only dream about for their own children.

Vidal paid a visit to one of the three candidates on Wednesday, touring the campus at Lincoln during the middle school's open house, an event held as part of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District's "Public Schools Week," where every campus in the district was opened for one morning this week.

The visit left Vidal seriously considering the public school as the front-runner, pleased with the diversity in the student population, impressed with the quality of instruction and excited at the variety of activities offered in the physical education program.

"I want to be able to provide my daughter with the best options," the Santa Monica resident said on Wednesday.

The district's first Community Open House week has already been deemed a success by its organizers, attracting hundreds of parents to the public schools since it kicked off on Tuesday at Olympic High School. Many of the parents visiting the campuses did so even if their child wasn't yet enrolled in the school, weighing the school as an option against several other choices.

Nine years after her middle child graduated from Lincoln Middle School, Maria Ruiz was back on campus touring the campus, this time to see if it's the right fit for her son, who is an eighth grader at Roosevelt Elementary.

"The school has changed a lot," Ruiz said. "The teachers look a lot younger, which could help them (relate better) with the students."

Vidal still has several months left before she needs to make her final deci-

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Photo courtesy of Steven Barber

ON THE ROAD TO VICTORY: Team Paul Mitchell rides three wide in a scene from Steven Barber's 'Challenge Alaska,' a documentary chronicling a road race for wheelchair-bound athletes that spans 267 miles in six days. The film was produced by a local filmmaker Steven Barber.

Documentary film draws major buzz in Tinseltown

Dan Aykroyd narrates local's film on disabled

BY MELODY HANATANI
Daily Press Staff Writer

CITYWIDE When Steven Barber was forced out of an advertising company two years ago after more than two decades in the field, the last place he imagined landing was on "Good Morning America."

But the media promotion circuit is exactly what the Santa Monican has been doing since his documentary film about the world's longest wheelchair race has drawn buzz in Hollywood circles, attracting support from the likes of Pamela

Anderson, Steve Forbes and Oprah Winfrey.

"The Alaskan Challenge 2007" documents the journey of a team of three local paraplegic men who participated in a 267-mile, seven-day marathon on wheelchairs and handcycles through Alaska this summer.

The film is currently in post-production and Barber is in the process of raising the approximately \$211,000 budget necessary to put the finishing touches on the documentary. The Santa Monica filmmaker recently got a boost to his fundraising efforts when funnyman Dan Aykroyd donated not only his money, but his voice to the film, signing on as narrator.

"I almost hung up on him and I was like 'yeah, who is this really?'" Barber said

of his recent phone conversation with Aykroyd.

Barber has enjoyed a short, yet successful film journey since he left the advertising world, took his severance package and purchased \$50,000 worth of camera equipment to chase his lifelong dream. In the past two years, he has directed two other documentaries — "Punchin' Pat," which depicts a boxer, and "The Eddie Albert Story," a film about the late "Green Acres" actor, filmed shortly before his death in 2005.

The filmmaker claims that none of these documentary ideas came from him, but the subjects rather found him through chance — he ran into the boxer

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District opens up to residents

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sion as to which school her daughter, who is a fifth grader at Roosevelt Elementary, will attend next year. Until last year, Vidal's daughter attended St. Monica and the Santa Monica resident is considering whether her daughter should return to the Catholic school next year.

"So far, I'm impressed," Vidal said of Lincoln.

Each of the 16 campuses in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District opened its doors to the community for one day this week. The point of the week-long event was to showcase a school district nationally recognized for the quality of education it provides to its students.

"The community is a big part of the schools and the schools are a big part of the community," said district PTA President Rebecca Kennerly. "We felt we owed it to the community to show what we're doing and accomplishing school-to-school."

Sponsored by the PTA, the Santa Monica-Malibu Classroom Teachers Association and the SEIU Local 99, the Community Open House is held as part of Public School Week.

A different set of schools was opened

for observation during school hours, showing parents a working classroom. Wednesday was dedicated to the elementary schools, while Thursday was for the middle school and Malibu High School. The open house concludes at Santa Monica High School today.

About 50 parents visited Lincoln Middle School, touring the campus in groups led by administrators and volunteer docents. The tours took parents to history, Spanish and English classes in session, to the school's athletic facilities, which includes a rock climbing room, and to a string ensemble rehearsal. Many of the school parents seemed surprised at the programs offered at Lincoln, which includes a swimming class and rock-climbing class as part of the physical education curriculum.

Patricia Payró-Freeman, who volunteered as a docent, said she wishes the Community Open House existed when her child started at Lincoln Middle School three years ago.

"It's reassuring," Payró-Freeman said. "You get a better sense of how the school works, you feel welcome."

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BIG MOMENT

Photo courtesy of William Foster
Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger joins 8-year-old Itzamaya Nuñez in lighting the Christmas tree on Tuesday during the 76th Annual State Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony.

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