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## Film captures what makes Victorville unique city

Filmmaker wants newcomers to experience the history

By TATIANA PROPHET Staff Writer

VICTORVILLE — With a Starbucks on nearly every corner, Victorville is starting to look like Anytown, Calif. But not if Hastin Zylstra has anything to say about it.

Not that the young film-maker is trying to stop progress; he just wants newcomers to experience what makes Victorville unique.

“So many people who move up here, they don’t know the history,” said Zylstra, 20, who directed and edited the film “Remembering Victorville,” premiering Wednesday at the High Desert Cultural Arts Foundation. “But it’s so much more than the history. It’s the people, it’s the places, it’s the time, it’s everything.”

The film is the brainchild of Rick Piercy, CEO of the Academy for Academic Excellence, whose father, Rick Sr., passed away not long before filming began.

Zylstra, a recent graduate of the academy, worked with film instructor Steven Orsinelli, the writer and producer, and Piercy, who narrated and executive produced the film as a tribute to his father.

Unlike a traditional historical documentary, the film uses the storytelling of Victorville residents to convey what makes the town like no other.

Through the eyes of Bill Betterley, Shirley Davisson, Robert Powell, Ron Butts, Peggy Sartor and others, Zylstra takes the viewer through the experience of growing up in Victorville in the first half of the 20th century.

“There was just this level of community in that whole area that was the biggest thing we ended up taking out of the whole thing,” said Zylstra, referring to Old Town.

In one vignette, Ron Butts and his buddies are standing outside the old El Rancho movie theater on 6th and C streets, now a church, as Butts tells one of many stories about their childhood in Victorville. In one story, Butts made a stink bomb from his chemistry set, then put it in his pocket before going to dancing lessons at the Kemper Campbell Ranch. Having forgotten about the stink bomb, Butts and his buddies went to the movies at El Rancho, where the would-be chemist then remembered his handiwork.

“It started burning a hole in my pocket, so I took it out and set it down.”

The stink bomb slid down to the front row of the theater and caused everyone to leave. The unhappy ordeal ended with Butts being sent home with instructions to have his father call the theater owner.

In another scene, the group of friends reminisces about local law enforcement — a total of four people including the county game warden — making the town sound more like Mayberry than Victorville. There was Zeke, the 6-foot-4-inch sheriff’s deputy in charge, plus two highway patrolmen, Buzz Banks and Bob Garrison.

“You wouldn’t know they were highway patrolmen except they wore a uniform,” one remembers. “They were like friends.”

Then there was the game warden.

“He got on us a few too many times for catching too many fish,” said another.

Using old photographs and stories from local residents, the film captures a sense of how Victorville became a town, with cattle ranching and cement mining being two of the main industries. And it takes the viewer through the roaring '20s, the Great Depression and World War II — events that affected the country as a whole but Victorville in its own unique way.

Much of the activity discussed in the movie centers around the Old Town area — no coincidence for Zylstra.

“It really gives you a different understanding of how that was the main center of town,” he said. “I’m really hoping it brings people to the understanding that some of these places need to be restored and preserved.”

Although a few of the landmarks, like the Mesa Theater and the Red Rooster Café and the Crystal Plunge community pool, have been torn down, other buildings remain, if shadows of their former glory, such as the El Rancho Theater and the Barrell House Liquor Store and Deli.

When Zylstra shot the film, he said, some people in Old Town were asking him what he was bothering to capture.

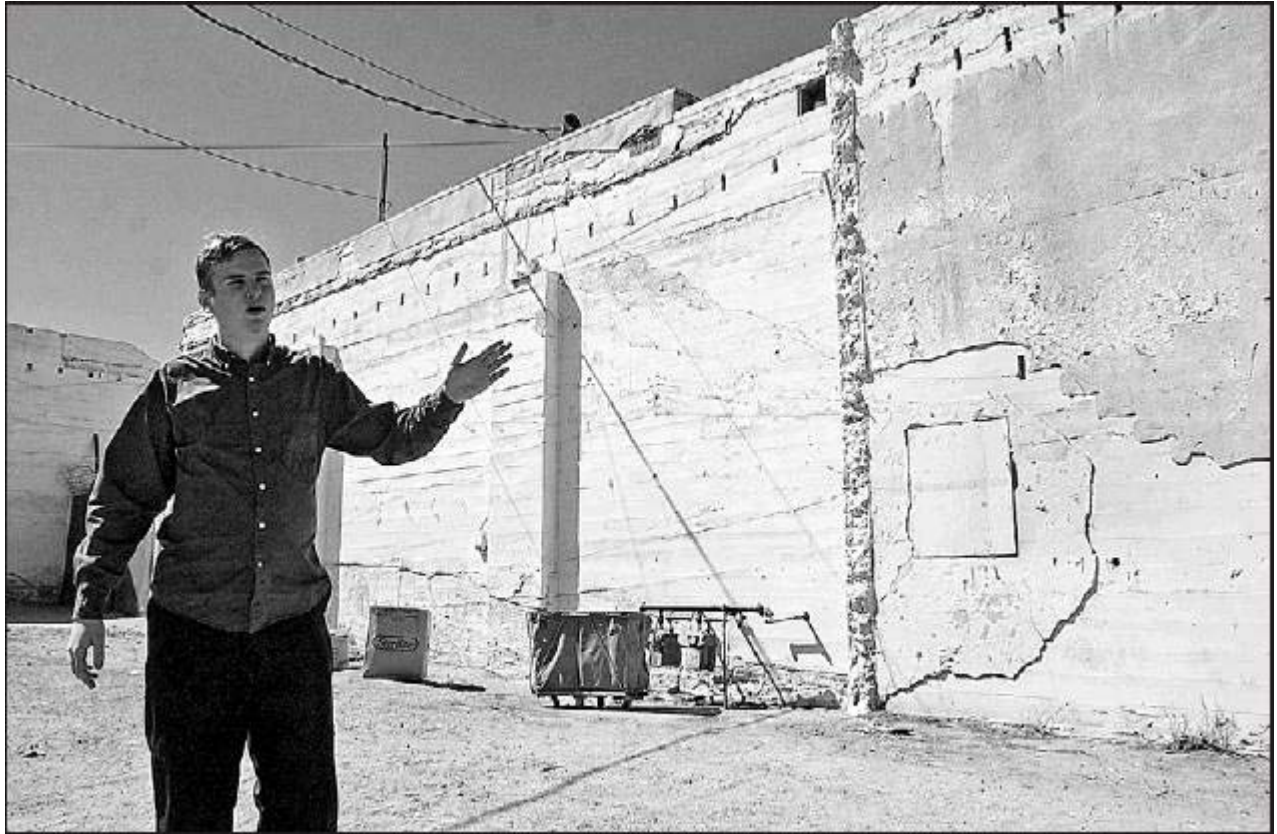
“All of this history that now won’t be forgotten,” he said, waving his hand in front of him as he walked on C Street.

The free showing of “Remembering Victorville” is Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the High Desert Cultural Arts Foundation at 15315 8th St. in Victorville, at the corner of 8th and C streets. There may be more than one showing, depending on turnout.



**Eric Tom / Staff Photographer**

Hastin Zylstra, the director and editor of a new documentary called ‘Remembering Victorville’, stands in front of where the original post office was located along Seventh Street in Old Town Victorville on Sunday.



**Eric Tom / Staff Photographer**

Hastin Zylstra stands on the former location of Victorville's first movie theater as he explains some of the history he discovered while working on his documentary, on C Street in old town.

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