

**UP PREMIERE MOVIE**

***Saving Westbrook High***

Premieres on UP

**Sunday, October 20**

**7 p.m. EDT, with encores at 9 and 11 p.m. EDT**

**SYNOPSIS**

Manny Cortez (Esai Morales) has scrimped and saved to buy a two-bedroom home for his family – wife Teresa (Adyana de la Torre) and daughters Selena (Julianne Cabrera), 14, and Gabriela (Bianca Red Arrow), 12 – so that the girls can attend Westbrook High where his beloved late father was the basketball coach. Westbrook High is one of the top schools in the state, known for its extraordinary teachers and parent involvement. No sooner does the Cortez family move into the suburban school district, than the local school board announces that Westbrook High will close at the end of the year and be consolidated into a new, “super-school” to save money. This isn’t going down without a fight. Charismatic English literature teacher Elijah Bennett (Coby Ryan McClaughlin) leads the staff, including devoted drama teacher Doris Howell (Loretta Devine), history teacher Sara Davies (Clare Carey), chemistry teacher Boomer Joseph (Brian Lafontaine) and Assistant Principal Robert Melville (Greg Alan Williams). They soon meet the new principal, Dr. Christine Walker (Salli Richardson-Whitfield), who has very different views on education and the value of protesting the school board’s decision. Years ago, Elijah and Christine were close as Westbrook High students and despite their differences now, a bond and some sparks remain. Perhaps the most passionate about saving the school are the students, especially shy and insecure Jasper (Adrian Kali Turner) who emerges as a leader. Selena joins the cause and learns why her father is so passionate about this school, her grandfather and her education. In the end, they all discover the value of family and community, finding a place where you truly belong and uniting to fight for the right cause.

“*Saving Westbrook High* is a film that we feel very passionate about,” said Brad Siegel, vice chairman, UP. “In the last few years, our country has experienced the largest increase of school closings and consolidations ever, uprooting hundreds of thousands of students from neighborhood schools. This film entertainingly celebrates those teachers, parents and students who come together to fight to keep these beloved institutions in their communities.”

“Schools do not exist in a void, and as such, the input, participation and support of parents, students, the community, and its elected leaders are all necessary to keep good teachers and good schools in place as neighborhood cornerstones,” said Barbara Fisher, svp, original programming, UP. “With an award-winning ensemble cast led by Esai Morales, Salli Richardson-Whitfield and Loretta Devine, *Saving Westbrook High* brings these timely issues to television in an entertaining, compelling and relatable manner that we hope inspires conversation and debate with families and educational professionals.”

The film will have a limited theatrical release before it makes its television premiere exclusively on UP.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

*Saving Westbrook High* was shot on location at Lake Norman Christian School in Davidson, North Carolina, a suburb of Charlotte. “I had heard of a couple of schools closing around the time I wrote this and that sort of sparked my interest,” said writer Rhonda Baraka. “I started doing research and I realized that it was happening all over the country. It really fed my desire to tell the story. It is timely and ripped from the headlines.” Director Gary Wheeler agrees. “I think this is a very important story. In so many ways our communities are portrayed as very fractured but I think in reality we work together far more than the opposite. From the moment I read the first few pages of the script, I wanted to make this film.”

The story of *Saving Westbrook High* was important to the cast and producers. “The story on the face of it is about a school closing and about a community coming together to save a school,” said Baraka. “But at the core it’s about a lot more. It’s about unity, community, family, parents who have dreams and desires for their children and the things we do as parents to realize those dreams.”

Actress Salli Richardson-Whitfield added: “Teachers, parents and students really can take control of your education. Many times people are complacent, but if everyone would come together like they do in this film, we can make a difference in our schools. You can be inspired and do the same thing in your own community.” Actor Esai Morales likes that he can watch *Saving Westbrook High* with his family. “When you have children you want them to be proud of your efforts and this movie is something I can watch with my whole family.” Brian Lafontaine feels the same way. “One of the things that drew me to this film is that it is for the whole family. Mom, Dad and the kids can sit down and watch it together.”

Coby Ryan McLaughlin thinks “people will relate to the characters. It’s relevant; it’s not negative. It’s an uplifting story. You see people work hard for a common goal and actually make things happen. It all depends on how hard you are willing to fight for what you believe in.” Greg Alan Williams also likes the message of *Saving Westbrook High*. “We are a very diverse country. We have our own interests but we see again and again good folks coming together in a common cause. It’s what we do. And what’s wonderful about this film is that it reminds us of who we are. This film is uplifting. In the face of the news, in the face of politics, all that is going on in the world and in our country, we need to be reminded about how we come together when necessary.”

As they were shooting, the actors reflected on favorite teachers from their lives. Actress Loretta Devine said “I remember my high school teachers. They believed in me and told me that I was good at a specific thing, told me what my problems were. Teachers are so important because young people deal with them on a daily basis and they are at the core of their lives. They are shaping the future.”

Lafontaine remembered a very important person who shaped his future: “I went to Catholic school and there was a brother there that was a tremendous support to me. I was a shy kid and I went through a really difficult time as a teenager. He was determined to push me in the right direction. He was the first one to put me in front of other people and tell me I could talk and they will listen because I have a lot of important things to say. I have a lot of fantastic people in my life, but I don’t know if anybody can beat him.”

Actress Clare Carey paid tribute to great teachers: “I think teaching is an art and it is a talent and not everybody has it. Good teachers who really inspire kids, who connect with kids, who find out who they really are and switch that light on – that is gold. If you are a good teacher, you are a gift to the world.”

The message in *Saving Westbrook High* resonated with the actors who were bringing the story to life. Carey relates to many of the story points in *Saving Westbrook High*: “I spend a lot of time at my own kids’ school. I have been to school board meetings. I have been in this world and for me it is close to home. I know how important it is for a community to rally around a school. I believe in public education and in fighting for it. It’s a positive message and something I can watch with my kids.”

Morales says of his character Manny Cortez: “He’s a parent. He’s a real person. He’s a printing press operator. He works hard, 12-hour shifts to get his family to a neighborhood where they can finally get a proper education and they decide to close the school down. He just deems it unacceptable and acts accordingly. I hope this serves as a blueprint for a lot of communities to save what they cherish.”

Baraka concluded: “There’s something to be said for that little school on the corner that you can walk to and everybody knows everybody and generations of families have gone there. Community and tradition and people really take a stand for what they believe in and speaking up even when it’s unpopular and a risk to do so.”

## **INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR, GARY WHEELER**

**How would you describe the story in *Saving Westbrook High*?**

To me, the film is about a community that comes together from very diverse backgrounds to save their school. It is an important lesson in working together for a common goal.

**What attracted you to this story?**

From the moment I read the first few pages of the script, I wanted to make this film. For one, it’s funny but in a very organic way. These are real people in a very difficult situation but they keep their humor about them. Secondly, I think it is a very important story. In so many ways, our communities are portrayed as very fractured. but I think in reality we work together far more than the opposite.

**Your cast is a mix of seasoned actors and newcomers. How did they all work together?**

Of all the films I've made, this set was the most harmonious. It was such a peaceful set and the cast got along like they had known each other their whole lives. There was a lot of laughter and joy on the set. The teachers all liked each other; the kids did too and so did the crew.

**You shot at a private school outside of Charlotte, NC. What makes the location special?**

We shot at Lake Norman Christian School in Davidson, NC. It was a great location. It is a very vintage school, which complemented the look we wanted to accomplish for the film. Every day, we kept saying to ourselves, 'What a perfect location.' In addition to the school, the whole town of Davidson is a very picturesque location and we tried to talk advantage of that as much as possible.

**What are some of your favorite memories from the shoot?**

Most of my favorite memories come from the relationships that I saw blossom on set. For me, the highlight was seeing a group of people come together to collaborate so peacefully. Performance-wise, my favorite moments were when the cast delivered on the potential of the script. It is a very large cast and almost every role had a character arc. So each actor – Esai, Salli, Loretta, Coby, Clare, Brian, GregAlan, Adrian, Julianne, etc. - all had their moment in the sun and they delivered.

***Saving Westbrook High* has a great story about following your passion and fighting for what you believe in. What other story points will we be seeing?**

I think the humor will really stand out for the audience. There are genuinely funny, heartwarming moments throughout the film.

**What do you hope viewers will take away from this film?**

I hope the audience will first and foremost enjoy it as a film. Beyond that I think this is a film about community and connecting with each other. I hope the audience will reach out in their individual lives and work together more.

## **CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**

### **EMMANUEL "MANNY" CORTEZ**

With Manny, what you see is what you get. He's a no-frills, no-hype, no-nonsense kind of guy. When he was a boy, Manny dreamed of attending Westbrook High, but the closest he ever got to the school was an occasional football game with his father who served as the school's celebrated football coach.

Manny's parents struggled to make ends meet and often had to bear the responsibility for other family members as well. Consequently, the Cortezes could never afford to live in the prestigious West Haven community and Manny's dream of attending Westbrook went unfulfilled.

When Manny grew up, married and had children of his own, he was determined that they would have a better life than he did. He and his wife Teresa have worked, scrimped and saved for years, hoping to someday buy a home in the West Haven community.

When we meet them, the Cortezes have recently bought a modest home in the community and their oldest daughter, Selena, is enjoying her first year at the school that Manny always dreamed of attending. Manny is thrilled. But his elation turns to devastation when he learns that the school is on the verge of closing.

Not impressed by the 'bigger is better' philosophy associated with Langley High, Manny wants his daughter to experience the camaraderie and commitment to top notch education that Westbrook has always been known for.

### **DR. CHRISTINE WALKER**

One look at Christine and you know she's smart. She carries herself with a self-assuredness that screams intellect and accomplishment, spiked with an air of superiority. But hidden beneath the surface is a potentially debilitating sense of insecurity, born during her childhood and buried so deep over the years that even Christine has almost forgotten its existence.

A graduate of Westbrook High, Christine received an academic scholarship to Columbia University and left her hometown right after high school. She graduated from Columbia -- at the top of her class -- with a degree in education, pursued a doctorate and moved to Washington, D.C. where she had a stellar career as a principal and consultant to some of the top school systems in the nation.

Christine returns home to find that little has changed since she left. Growing up in the West Haven community and attending Westbrook as a teen, Christine was a loner: too smart, too plain and too 'geeky' to be a part of the in-crowd at the popular school. Needless to say, Westbrook holds some not-so-fond memories for her.

But Christine is nothing if she's not ambitious so she accepts the offer to become Westbrook's principal, with the understanding that it will be short-lived and pave the way to bigger and better things.

Returning to Westbrook inspires a rush of memories and emotions that Christine is not prepared to deal with, but she is determined to stay the course, crack the whip, effect change and stand up to adversarial teachers -- among them, a free-spirited English-Lit teacher named Elijah Bennett. What she doesn't realize is that once she returns to her Alma Mater, she will not only be forced to make some tough decisions about the fate of the school but she'll also have to come face to face with her own insecurities and rediscover what's really important to her, her students and her community.

### **DORIS HOWELL**

Having been at Westbrook for many years as a Drama teacher, Doris knows "where all the bodies are buried." She's wise, compassionate, God-fearing and committed to the school. She's usually the calm voice of reason in the midst of confusion or the silent, knowing glance when no words are needed.

Doris's life has not been easy but you'd never know it. Orphaned at a young age, she spent her childhood years bouncing around from one relative's home to the other. She was not the easiest kid to raise. She finally ended up with an aunt who set her on the right path, made her stay in school and paved the way for her to go to college. Doris left school determined to pay it forward. Her work at Westbrook High goes far beyond helping students decide what college they should attend. She's the one they turn to when they're in trouble, confused or afraid. She also spends time mentoring at-risk inner city teens who live miles away from her quiet suburban neighborhood -- much to the dismay of her family and friends who feel that she goes overboard in her efforts to help.

### **ELIJAH BENNETT**

Elijah Bennett looks every bit the self-absorbed Bohemian who plays solely by his own set of rules. But that's only one side to this complex man's personality. He's a poet, a romantic, and every bit the rebel. He is also a man with a strong sense of faith, which he openly embraces but never forces upon others.

Also a Westbrook High graduate, Elijah has always been a bit of an enigma. His gentle demeanor, charm and striking good looks have made him the object of many women's affections but his heart still seems to belong to his wife who passed away several years ago. Losing her dealt a devastating blow to his faith. But over time, he has rebounded and is now more resolute in his beliefs than ever.

Elijah has been at Westbrook High for four years and he loves being a teacher. His students love him; so do his co-workers. He is well-versed on all things artistic (literature, music, theater) and while he doesn't try to sell anyone on his spiritual beliefs, he never hesitates to try to enlighten someone on jazz fusion, stream of consciousness, cubism or any other form of art that he might hold in high esteem.

As a teacher, Elijah is a rare breed. He has a genuine love and concern for his students. He listens to them, understands them and is actually less concerned about them acing tests than he is about them absorbing information that they can carry with them for a lifetime. Needless to say, his style doesn't sit well with everyone. But the students do and that's really all that matters to Elijah.

### **SARA DAVIES**

Sara is a true throwback to the '60s in every way, from her lingo to her attire to her way of thinking. Sara's parents were musicians and flower children who married young. She was born during Woodstock. Their music careers never really took off but they traveled all over the country doing small gigs, opting to homeschool their daughter through middle school. Sara had a thirst for knowledge and a penchant for activism and, as a teacher, she teaches her students not only about historical dates and facts but about how events of the past helped to shape the present. She's a history buff who always ready to "stick it to the man.'

### **BOOMER JOSEPH**

A former research and development manager at a pharmaceuticals company, Boomer left his job because he couldn't handle the pressure or the rat race. He became a school teacher instead, much to the dismay of his wife who divorced him because she refused to live on a teacher's salary. When we meet Boomer, he is missing his wife and contemplating leaving Westbrook and staging a return to corporate America. Though he's a brilliant chemist, he wasn't a great manager but he is, nonetheless an excellent teacher. Still, he feels that he deserves more out of life: money, prestige...and his ex-wife.

### **ROBERT MELVILLE**

Robert is a bit of a loner. He's not a mean person but he's not very likable, mainly because he keeps to himself and is a stickler for decorum and protocol. For years he has longed to be principal of his beloved Westbrook and for years he has been passed over for the position. When Christine Walker is brought in as the new principal and Robert is snubbed yet again, he is mortified, angry and desperate.

### **INTERVIEW WITH THE WRITER, RHONDA BARAKA**

**How would you describe the story in *Saving Westbrook High*?**

*Saving Westbrook High* is a story about a small yet successful community school that is on the verge of closing and the students, families and teachers who unite to fight for its survival.

**How did you come up with the story?**

Initially the story revolved around a group of eclectic teachers who really, really care about their students. When we decided to put the teachers and students in some type of crisis, an impending school closure

made sense because, as anyone who keeps up with the news knows, schools are being closed all over the country due to budget cuts, overcrowding and poor performance.

**The characters are rich and fully-rounded. Did you base the characters on teachers you have known?**

They all have bits and pieces of teachers that I've had in the past both in high school and college but my primary goal in drawing these characters was to make them interesting, fun and dramatically different from one another.

**Your cast is a mix of seasoned actors and newcomers. How did they all work together?**

The actors worked together beautifully. It was great to see the newcomers learn from the vets and absolutely amazing to watch the vets feed off one another.

**What memories from the shoot stand out?**

There were so many great moments while the cameras were rolling and when they weren't. Here are some that really stand out for me: Loretta Devine's quips and one-liners when the cameras weren't rolling; Salli Richardson-Whitfield singing between takes; Esai Morales cracking everyone's backs and giving massages. One of the coolest things of all was watching our group of teenage extras – we called them the 'core kids' (or 'Breakfast Club 2.0') – become such good friends in real life. There were between seven and ten of them (two of them were my kids) and they were inseparable during the entire shoot. It was really sad when we wrapped them and they had to say goodbye.

**What do you hope viewers will take away from this movie?**

I hope that viewers will leave this movie with a greater love and respect for the men and women who really do work hard to give our kids a good education and often go above and beyond the call of duty. I also hope we'll all come to appreciate tradition a bit more and family and community and last, but not least, acceptance. I hope the film will teach people to never be afraid to stand up for what you believe in – even if you're the only one standing.

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

### **ESAI MORALES (“MANNY”)**

Award-winning actor Esai Morales is recognized as a force to be reckoned with and one of the most intriguing actors of our time. His feature film debut in *Bad Boys*, opposite Sean Penn, put him on the map as a powerful leading man. Since then, Morales has continuously offered performances that strongly resonate in the hearts and minds of a diverse and international audience. His breakthrough role in *La*



*Bamba*, the most commercially successful Latino-themed Rock and Roll biopic of all time, cemented him as a star.

Some of his most memorable film credits include *Rapa Nui*, produced by Kevin Costner; the award-winning HBO film *The Burning Season: The Chico Mendes Story*, directed by John Frankenheimer; Gregory Nava's film *Mi Familia*, and Richard Linklater's *Fast Food Nation*. He also starred in the films, *The Line*, *Atlas Shrugged: Part II*, as the iconic Francisco De Anconia and starred and executive produced *Gun Hill Road*, a Grand Jury Nominee at the Sundance Film Festival in 2011.

Morales made his stage debut in "El Hermano," at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York. Some of his most memorable theater performances include: Oscar Wilde's "Salome," with Al Pacino on Broadway; Joe Papp's production of "The Tempest," with Raul Julia for New York's Shakespeare in the Park Festival; "Tamer Of Horses" for the Los Angeles Theater Center, for which he was awarded the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award; "The Exonerated," directed by Bob Balaban; and the San Francisco run of the musical "The Mambo Kings" – Morales' musical theater debut.

Morales' credible and commanding role in the Emmy® award-winning series "NYPD Blue" broke new ground and gave him critical acclaim. Other award-winning shows include Showtime's "Resurrection Blvd."; PBS's drama series "American Family"; FOX's "Vanished"; and USA's "Burn Notice" as well as CBS's drama "Jericho" and the Syfy series "Caprica," opposite Eric Stoltz. He was also featured recurring on USA's "Fairly Legal," as District Attorney Aaron Davidson.

In 2002, Morales won The Alma Award as Best Actor in a Television Series, and was honored as Entertainer of the Year at the 17th Annual Imagen Awards for his work on "NYPD Blue." He won an Imagen Award for Best Actor for his tour de force performance in *Gun Hill Road*, and an Imagen Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor in a Television Series for his work in "American Family." His performance on Lifetime's *We Have Your Husband* won him a NAACP nomination.

In 2013, he joined the cast of CBS' drama "Criminal Minds" and is recurring in the Starz' "Magic City."

A self-described "actorvist," Morales has combined his passion and understanding of the human condition to build bridges across and beyond ethnic lines. Throughout his career, Morales has been an advocate for countless charities and causes. These causes include literacy, environment, health, immigration, arts funding and social justice issues as well as his consistent evolutionary message inspiring our youth to strive towards a higher purpose and meaningful life.

### **SALLI RICHARDSON-WHITFIELD ("CHRISTINE")**

Salli Richardson-Whitfield garnered public attention with her breakout role in *Posse*, followed by *A Low Down Dirty Shame*, *I Am Legend*, *I Will Follow* and *Pastor Brown*, which premiered on Lifetime in February.

She recently wrapped shooting on the upcoming Robert Townsend film, *Playin' For Love*, due to be released in 2014.

Salli's television credits include "Eureka," which she also directed, along with "The Newsroom," "Criminal Minds" and "CSI Miami." Her first directed narrative short "Grace" was accepted to numerous film festivals throughout the country in 2011 and 2012.

### **LORETTA DEVINE ("DORIS")**

Equally at home on stage or on screen, award-winning actress Loretta Devine has created some of the most memorable roles in theatre, film and television. Devine first captured national attention in the role of "Lorrell," one of the three original "Dreamgirls" in Michael Bennett's classic award-winning Broadway musical of the same name. She followed that performance with a fiery portrayal of Lillian in Bob Fosse's critically-acclaimed stage production "Big Deal." Subsequent work in George C. Wolfe's "Colored Museum" and "Lady Day at Emerson Bar and Grill," cemented Devine's status as one of the most talented and versatile stage actresses.

Film roles soon followed including a poignant turn as a single mother opposite Whitney Houston, Angela Bassett and Gregory Hines in *Waiting to Exhale*, which earned her a NAACP Image Award for Best Supporting Actress. Devine also won an NAACP Image Award for Best Supporting Actress for her work in Penny Marshall's *The Preacher's Wife*. She received an IFP Spirit Award nomination for Best Actress for her work in *Women Thou Art Loosed*. In addition, Devine was featured in the Academy Award-winning film *Crash* and the hit movie of *Dreamgirls*.

Additional film credits include appearances in the successful *Urban Legend* franchise; *I Am Sam* opposite Michelle Pfeiffer and Sean Penn; *Kingdom Come*; *What Women Want*; *Punks*; *Hoodlum*; *Down in the Delta*; and *Stanley and Iris*. Devine also appeared in *Sticky Fingers*, *Amos and Andrew*, *The Breaks*, *The Price of Kissing*, *Lover Girl*, *Class Act*, *Living Large*, *Caged Fear*, *Little Nikita* and *Dirty Laundry*.

In 2009, Devine co-starred in *This Christmas* and *First Sunday*, both of which opened number one at the box office. She voiced the character of "Delta," the chocolate brown toy poodle in *Beverly Hills Chihuahua* for Disney, starring Drew Barrymore. Her most recent releases include Sony Screen Gems' remake of *Death At A Funeral* with Chris Rock, Martin Lawrence and Danny Glover; *Lottery Ticket* for Alcon/Warner Bros.' *For Colored Girls* directed by Tyler Perry; *Broom* with Paula Patton, Laz Alonso and Angela Bassett; and *Madea's Big Happy Family*.

On television, Devine can be currently seen on "The Client List," and she voices the character, "Hallie the Hippo," on Disney Junior's number one animated series, "Doc McStuffins," for which she won a 2013 NAACP Image Award. She has had starring roles on numerous series including her Emmy-winning role as "Adele" the chief's wife on ABC's hit medical drama "Grey's Anatomy," "Eli Stone" and "Boston Public," for

which she received three NAACP Image Awards. Devine's additional credits include series roles in "A Different World" and Lifetime Television's "Wild Card." She also starred in the highly rated Lifetime Original Movie "The Fantasia Barrino Story: Life is Not a Fairy Tale." Devine also provided the voice of Muriel Stubbs on the beloved animated series, "The PJ's."

Devine graduated from the University of Houston and later received a Master of Fine Arts in Theater Arts from Brandeis University. She also received a Doctorate of Humane Letters from The University of Houston and will receive a distinguished alumni award from The University of Houston this spring. She currently resides in Los Angeles.

### **COBY RYAN MCLAUGHLIN ("ELIJAH")**

With standout roles in numerous television projects, Coby Ryan McLaughlin is a rising star to be reckoned with. Coby has recurred in several primetime series, including ABC Family's "The Secret Life of the American Teenager," A&E's "The Glades," ABC's "Women's Murder Club" as Dr. Luke Bowen, and Fox's "Back to You" alongside Kelsey Grammer and Patricia Heaton. In addition, McLaughlin has made memorable appearances on other popular television shows such as "Mike and Molly," HBO's "How to Make it in America," "Shark" with James Woods, and Fox's crime drama "Bones." Some of his earlier work includes lead roles in the pilots "Genetically Challenged" for FOX; and "Inseparable" for CBS alongside veteran actors Christine Baranski and Ed O'Neill.

McLaughlin's talents have also found their way into the world of feature films with impressive work in the projects *The Trouble With Romance* and *Lost Treasure* with Nicollette Sheridan and Stephen Baldwin.

Coby is an accomplished musician who enjoys, professional car racing, rock climbing and skiing.

### **CLARE CAREY ("SARA")**

Clare Carey is an actress you recognize – whether you know her as "Mary Bailey," the bartender rebel from CBS' cult hit "Jericho," or as "Coach's" daughter "Kelly" from ABC's long-running sitcom, or maybe you've seen her episode of "Weeds" more than a few times (in which she plays "the biter"). Over the last 25 years, you have probably caught Carey in one of her over 50 memorable guest star roles on TV shows such as "Revenge," "Chuck," "NCIS," "Harry's Law," "Private Practice," "CSI," "Castle," "Grey's Anatomy," "The Unit," "Boston Legal," "Without A Trace," "Cold Case," "Monk," and many more. Her next guest star gig will be as a mother in the center of a really messed up family in TNT's "Major Crimes."

Carey has also had series regular roles on "Crash," Starz' version of the Oscar winning film; ABC Family's "So Little Time," Mary Kate and Ashley's sitcom swan song; and in FOX's ill-fated "Point Pleasant," a little gem that you should watch all 13 delicious episodes of if you can find them anywhere. Busy in the independent film world as well, Carey has appeared in indie festival faves *True Love*; *La Cucina* with Christina Hendricks and Rachel Hunter; and *The Trial* with Matthew Modine, directed by *Saving*

*Westbrook High*'s Gary Wheeler. Some standout cameos include Matthew Carnahan's *Smokin Aces* and *Unrequited*.

### **BRIAN LAFONTAINE ("BOOMER")**

Brian Lafontaine is a professional actor working in film, television, commercials, voiceovers and theatre. His film and television credits include *In/Significant Others*; *Big Momma's: Like Father, Like Son* with Martin Lawrence; and *The Trial* opposite Matthew Modine, Robert Forster and Bob Gunton. Lafontaine has also guest starred on such shows as "Revolution," "Dawson's Creek," "Surface," "One Tree Hill," "Ruffian," "From the Earth to the Moon," "Drop Dead Diva" and Showtime's Emmy-Award winning series "Homeland."

He has appeared in or voiced over 1000 television and radio commercials for Toyota, Exxon Mobil, the PGA Tour, Burger King, Windows Phone, Coca-Cola, PBS's Ocean Adventures, and DIY's Woodsculpting. This past spring, Lafontaine was the voice of The Golf Channel's "The Haney Project" with Michael Phelps.

His theatre resume is as diverse as his broadcast one. Lafontaine recently played Alan Raleigh in "God of Carnage." Other stage credits include "A Few Good Men," "The Laramie Project," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "Lost in Yonkers," and inclusion in the first American cast of "Lifegame," created by London's Improbable Theatre Company. In addition, Lafontaine has appeared Off Broadway in "Featuring Loretta," "Risk Everything" and "Barefoot In The Park."

Originally from Riverside, Rhode Island, Lafontaine now resides in Charlotte, NC.

### **GREGALAN WILLIAMS ("ROBERT")**

GregAlan Williams' broad list of credits include recurring roles on the USA network show "Necessary Roughness," BET's "The Game," HBO's "The Sopranos", and the new CBS pilot "Second Sight" opposite Jason Lee, Derek Luke, and Jill Scott. His 250 prime-time appearances also include "The West Wing," "NCIS Los Angeles," "Castle," "Law & Order Special Victims," "Boston Legal," and "Drop Dead Diva." And of course there is GregAlan's seven seasons as beach cop Garner Ellerbee on the most watched television show in the world, "Baywatch".

Williams' ongoing career boasts 40 feature films, including the classics *Remember The Titans* (Denzel Washington), *In The Line of Fire* (Clint Eastwood), *Old School* (Will Ferrel), and *Above The Law* (Steven Segal). Other work includes the hit Warner Bros. film *Preacher's Kid*, the civil rights drama *Blood Done Sign My Name*; Saturday Night Live's *McGruber*; Oliver Stone's *W*; and the upcoming BET movie, *Let The Church Say Amen*. Williams' 30 year career also includes work with Pulitzer Prize Winner August Wilson, Chicago Shakespeare Repertory Theater, Chicago's Goodman Theater, as well as the Twin Cities' world renowned Penumbra and Mixed Blood theater companies.

Author of two critically-acclaimed books, dozens of essays, and two award-winning public television specials, Williams was heralded nationally as a hero and Good Samaritan for his rescue of a brutally beaten motorist at the intersection of Florence and Normandie - epicenter of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Williams responded to these accolades with his book, *A Gathering of Heroes* (Kirkus Review), which was hailed as "...a moving illumination on the meaning of brotherhood." His deep and revealing conversation about male values, *Boys To Men - Maps for the Journey* (Doubleday/Bantam/Dell) was proclaimed, "a powerful parenting resource" for African-American mothers bringing sons to manhood.

Williams' eye-opening published essay, "For Black, Brown, and Beige, Baby Girls" – inspired by his seven seasons on the most watched television show in the world, "Baywatch" – affirms the beauty of women of color and the self-worth of every woman living in the age of cosmetic, manufactured, ultra-thin, and eternally youthful, media images.

In 1995, Williams' award winning, turn-of-the-century, one-man-show, "The Life and Times of Deacon A.L. Wiley," won top writing honors during the Black Film Makers Hall of Fame Film Festival. *1534 Cleveland*, Williams' collection of essays on growing up African-American in the Midwest during the turbulent sixties, was produced into an Emmy-nominated one-hour public television special in 2002. In addition to his work with fragile families and the Head Start Program, as well as lectures and keynotes from Harvard to Howard, Williams is long-time host of the "Black College Quiz," the nationally televised academic competition featuring top teams from America's HBCU's.

### **ADRIAN KALI TURNER ("JASPER")**

Known as a "child of the universe" by friends and family, Adrian Kali Turner is a triple threat who has proven that small town fame can turn into big-screen dreams. Known for his acting, singing, dancing, writing, and entrepreneurial skills, Turner takes the spotlight whether he is in front of a camera or behind a microphone and doesn't plan on leaving center stage any time soon. Currently a member of both the SAG and AFTRA unions, Turner became an award-winning actor at the young age of just nine years old. He won top recognition for Monologue and Commercial competitions at the AMTC in Orlando, FL, and qualified as a finalist for the Best Overall Child Actor award.

Immediately following AMTC, Turner left his Fayetteville, GA hometown and headed west for the City of Angels. He has since showcased his extraordinary talents on numerous television shows including Nickelodeon's "iCarly," ABC's "Flash Forward" and "Apartment 23," CBS's "Numb3rs," NBC's "Chuck," and AMC's hit zombie-drama, "The Walking Dead."

On the big screen, Turner landed roles in the Hollywood/Bollywood blockbuster *My Name is Khan*, and the box office hit *Bad Teacher*, starring opposite Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake, and Jason Segel. This year, Turner will appear in three feature films – the Nickelodeon film entitled *Camp Fred*, *Standing Up*, starring Val Kilmer; and *Behind Locked Doors*.

Despite his busy work schedule, Adrian manages to volunteer his time for worthwhile causes such as the Star Eco Station (a shelter for abandoned and exotic animals in Culver City, CA) and his charity, Toys for Teens. As a direct result of his love for comics, Adrian formed a non-profit company called "Comics are Cool" that uses comic books and superheroes to encourage reading and creativity among disadvantaged youth, especially boys.

Adrian is signed with CESD (Los Angeles/New York) and is managed by Luber Roklin Entertainment (Beverly Hills).

### **JULIANNE CABRERA ("SELENA")**

Newcomer Julianne Cabrera was born on December 29, 1997 in Charlotte, NC. Before she started performing publicly, she loved to dance, sing and act, and she would ask her brothers to video tape her acting out scenes. She was a very active and athletic child, starting sports at age 3 with gymnastics, soccer and basketball, but her passions were acting, singing and dancing. She began dancing at age six with a Latin dance company being the youngest dancer of the company and performing for live audiences at several different venues. Once she started middle school, her love for theatre grew as she performed different characters in skits, a dramatic play called "Step on a Crack," and later the musical "Guys and Dolls."

Julianne was thrilled when she got the part of Selena Cortez in *Saving Westbrook High*. The script really spoke to her because she believes that teachers play a major role in the life of a student and that a good teacher can inspire you to set goals and believe in yourself. She also loved how a community came together to fight for something they believed in

### **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION TEAM**

#### **GARY WHEELER (DIRECTOR)**

Gary Wheeler is a multi-award winning international filmmaker who has produced a number of motion picture and television productions around the world. He is the founder and President of the North Carolina based Level Path Productions where he has filmed eight feature films since 2006.

Wheeler's past films include the Emmy®-nominated television feature *The Heart of Christmas* (Director) based on a song by Grammy®-nominated artist Matthew West; *The Perfect Summer*, a surf movie starring Academy Award® Nominee Eric Roberts; *Somebody's Child* (Director), a television feature starring Michael Jai White (*The Dark Night*) and Lynn Whitfield (*Eve's Bayou*); *The Trial* (Writer, Producer, Director), distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and based on the Christy Award-winning novel by Robert Whitlow, starring Matthew Modine, Bob Gunton and Academy Award Nominee Robert Forster; *The List* (Writer, Producer, Director), a multi-award winning theatrical release starring Malcolm McDowell and Will Patton, which was

also distributed by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox; *Final Solution* (Producer), a critically acclaimed feature film shot in South Africa, starring Tony® Award winner John Kani which was broadcast nationally on PBS in the United States; and *Midnight Clear* (Producer), an award-winning Christmas special starring Stephen Baldwin and K Callan.

Recently, Wheeler completed production on the feature concert film *Ken Davis: Fully Alive*, which had a nationwide theatrical release; and *Jimmy* (Writer, Producer), a film based on the best-selling novel by Robert Whitlow and starring Ted Levine, Kelly Carlson, Bob Gunton and Sharon Lawrence.

In addition, Wheeler sits on several boards of directors and has guest lectured at multiple universities and film festivals. He is a member of the prestigious Producer's Guild of America.

### **ERIC TOMOSUNAS (PRODUCER)**

Over the course of 15 years, Eric Tomosunas has created a name for himself as a film producer and businessman within the urban entertainment industry. Under his production company Swirl Films, he spearheads the supervision and execution of production elements, and managing all distribution agreements with Image Entertainment, First Look Entertainment, Warner Brothers, Melee Entertainment, E1 formerly KOCH and Code Black. Recent original productions include: the NAACP Image Award nominated original movie "Somebody's Child," starring Michael Jai White (Outstanding Actor in a Television Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special), Byron Minns, Nadine Ellis, Clifton Powell and Lynn Whitfield; and the stage play, "Sugar Mommas," (Outstanding Television Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special) starring Terri J. Vaughn, Vanessa Williams, Rachel True, Lamman Rucker and Tommy Ford, both of which were produced for GMC TV (now known as UP). Other original productions include *Love For Sale*, a romantic comedy starring Jackie Long, Jason Weaver, Mya and Melyssa Ford; and *35 & Ticking*, a feel good romantic comedy starring Kevin Hart, Nicole Ari Parker, Keith Robinson, Tamela Jones and Darius McCrary. He has also produced several home video and theatrical titles including *The Under Shepherd*, a 2012 ABFF Official Selection and winner of ABFF Grand Jury Awards for Best Narrative Feature, Best Director (Russ Parr) and Best Actor (Malinda Williams). With over 35 original productions in the past five years, and award nominated movies and plays, Tomosunas' earlier work included ADR for Screen Gems Studio on projects such as the WB's TV Series "Dawson's Creek" and films *Swordfish*, *A Walk to Remember* and *Little Vampires*.

### **RHONDA F. BARAKA (WRITER)**

Rhonda Freeman-Baraka made her foray into the film industry with the 2008 production of her film *Pastor Brown*, a family drama that has been touted as an uplifting twist on the prodigal son story. Directed by Rockmond Dunbar ("Prison Break," "Soul Food"), *Pastor Brown* featured an all-star cast, including Dunbar,

Salli Richardson-Whitfield, Nicole Ari Parker, Keith David, Ernie Hudson, Tasha Smith, Michael Beach, Tisha Campbell-Martin and Michael B. Jordan.

*Pastor Brown* won rave reviews and garnered wide viewership during its premiere on Lifetime TV in February 2013. The critically-acclaimed movie was one of three original films presented by the network as part of a special Black History Month series.

Freeman-Baraka's 2011 release, *Trinity Goodheart*, a heartwarming family drama starring Erica Gluck ("The Game," "American Son," "Mirrors"), R&B singer Eric Benét (*Glitter*, "Kaya") and legendary actor James Hong ("Kung Fu Panda," "Avatar the Last Air Bender"), was the first original film produced by UP TV, and at the time of its premiere, was the highest-rated show in the history of the network.

As a member of the team that conceptualized Magic Johnson's ASPIRE Network, Ms. Freeman-Baraka was instrumental in the development of and serves as the writer for the network's dynamic talk show, "Exhale."

Through her company, ToKo Films, Freeman-Baraka is currently developing the romantic comedy *Looking For Jimmy Lee* with real-life husband and wife Boris Kodjoe ("Undercovers," *Resident Evil*, *Surrogates*) and Nicole Ari Parker (*The Deep End*, *Soul Food*, *Welcome Home*, *Roscoe Jenkins*).

### CREDITS

**UP presents a Swirl Films production**

Esai Morales

Salli Richardson-Whitfield

Loretta Devine

Coby Ryan McLaughlin

Clare Carey

Brian Lafontaine

GregAlan Williams

Adrian Kali Turner

Julianne Cabrera

**Directed by**

Gary Wheeler

**Produced by**

Eric Tomosunas, Dave Eubanks and Keith Neal



## Screenplay by

Rhonda F. Baraka

Follow our cast at:

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Follow UP on Facebook & Twitter

<http://facebook.com/UPtv> & @UPtv.

Esai Morales on Twitter [@Esai\\_Morales](https://twitter.com/Esai_Morales)

Salli Richardson-Whitfield on Twitter [@sallirichardson](https://twitter.com/sallirichardson)

Loretta Devine on Twitter [@lodivadevine](https://twitter.com/lodivadevine)

GregAlan Williams on Twitter [@GregAlanW](https://twitter.com/GregAlanW)

Adrian Kali Turner on Twitter [@AdrianKTurner](https://twitter.com/AdrianKTurner)

Visit [www.UPtv.com/SavingWestbrookHighPressRoom](http://www.UPtv.com/SavingWestbrookHighPressRoom)

for photos and additional materials.

## About UP

UP, ([www.UPtv.com](http://www.UPtv.com)) based in Atlanta, is America's favorite network for uplifting family entertainment. The network presents original and acquired movies, series, stage plays and music specials along with gMovies, the first faith-friendly streaming movie service. The UP brand is reflected in "Uplift Someone," the network's successful pro-social initiative. UP can be seen in more than 65 million homes on major cable systems including Comcast, Time Warner Cable, Cox Communications and Charter Communications, as well as DIRECTV on channel 338, DISH Network on channel 188 and Verizon FiOS on channel 224. Follow UP on Facebook & Twitter <http://facebook.com/UPtv> & [@UPtv](https://twitter.com/UPtv).

## About Swirl Films

Swirl Films ([www.swirlfilms.com](http://www.swirlfilms.com)), America's "number one urban film production company," focuses on independent features and multi-camera productions. Recent films include 2012 ABFF Best Narrative Feature, Best Actress and Best Director winner *The Under Shepherd, 35 & Ticking* and *Percentage*, with Flavor Unit Production (Queen Latifah & Shakim Compere). Swirl Films is a major content provider for UP. Most recently, Swirl Films produced *The Perfect Summer*, starring Eric Roberts, Sydney Penny and Jason Castro in his TV acting debut. In addition, hit programming includes *She's Still Not Our Sister*, *Sugar Mommas*, and the *Wedding Vow Series*. Additional original productions include: *Love For Sale*, *Something Like A Business*, *TV One's Roast and Toast of John Witherspoon* and *Just Another Day*.

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