

Film festival: Mathers, Wilcox families interacted

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ties to pursue.”

De Soto City Councilman Werner Stichling said he supports keeping the Wilcox celebration going from year to year.

“I’m enthusiastic over the fact it’s continuing to grow,” he said. “There are a lot of people showing interest in the film festival and it’s something unique to Jefferson County.”

Mathers said his family knew Wilcox and his family outside of working on the show. “I knew him on a couple different levels,” he said prior to the Friday night dinner. “He played a dentist, a judge and another character. He was a very nice man. I also knew him since my dad retired as superintendent of L.A. schools and when his (Wilcox’s) kids went to high school, my dad was principal of their school. My family would eat at his restaurant, the Oak Room. He was so nice to my family.”

He said he was happy to contribute to a celebration for Wilcox.

“When you look at his body of work, he was a very well-known actor who could play many different roles, good guys and bad guys.”

Mathers said talking about “Leave It To Beaver” does not get old for him.

“It’s never been off the air since 1957,” he said. “It’s shown in 79 different languages around the world. I do still watch them sometimes. It’s not like it’s a big thrill to see me on TV. I can do that anytime I want on DVD. But, it’s a good show, a real nice family show.”

When he watches an episode, memories from growing up on a TV show set crop up, Mathers said.

“I don’t have a favorite episode,” he said. “We had two days of rehearsal and three days of shooting. Each one is a week of my life from the time. It was a fun time.”

Elizabeth von Grempe, Wilcox’s youngest daughter, attended the fest for the second year in a row. She came alone this year after bringing relatives with her in 2013. “It’s a wonderful way to celebrate



Kevin Carbery photo

Gary and Raylene Hartman of Australia stopped in De Soto to see Jerry Mathers during their vacation to the U.S.

a career never really celebrated like it should have been,” said von Grempe, 53, of Laguna Niguel, Calif. “I would like to thank the city for celebrating my father. It’s awfully nice to come to town and see your dad’s face on posters all around town.”

She said she enjoyed chatting with guests at the dinner and other events of the weekend and believes her dad would have enjoyed it. “He loved a crowd,” she said.

She said her favorite of her father’s films is “The Sea Hawk.”

“It’s an Errol Flynn swashbuckler,” she said. “The greatest thing is I can still see and hear my dad (on screen).”

Von Grempe said while her older sisters went to the high school where Mathers’ father served as principal, she went to a different high school.

Australian couple reroutes trip to see Mathers

Gary and Raylene Hartman undoubtedly made the longest trip to get to the festival, having traveled from Perth, Australia. The Hartmans said they have made it an annual event to visit America since Gary retired as a policeman 13 years ago and always hoped to find a way to meet Mathers.

They are in the midst of a month-long visit to America, traveling by rental car.

After watching “They Died With Their Boots On,” the Hartmans said they were eager to see the “Leave It To Beaver” marathon the next day and hoped to meet Mathers.

“We aren’t rich – I drive a bus to pay for the trips,” said Gary, 60. “I’d wanted to see Jerry and my favorite band, the Eagles, but never could match up a trip for either of them. This was my first trip where I could do it.”

He said he learned of the Mathers appearance in De Soto by scanning the actor’s website.

“Raylene is into quilting,” he said. “We were supposed to go through Chicago, Michigan and Kentucky for quilt stores.”

“That’s all out the window, now,” said Raylene, 57, although she also indicated she is a fan of the program.

Gary said they hit a number of quilt stores in Missouri instead.

He said his acquaintance with “Leave It To Beaver” dates back to 1959.

“TV started in Perth (in western Australia) in 1959 and ‘Leave It To Beaver’ was the first show they aired,” he remembered. “I like the ones where he was younger, but I liked the whole show.”

Thomas said on Monday that the Hartmans met Mathers at the marathon at the Melba. “They got their pictures taken with him, got his autograph,” he said.

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