

Thousand Oaks Acorn

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Actor volunteers time to teach children

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By Sylvie Belmond

belmond@theacorn.com



MENTOR—Carmen Mormino shares his professional acting expertise by volunteering to work on productions at his daughters' schools, Westlake Elementary and Colina Middle schools. Mormino landed a role on the hit TV show "ER" early in his career. Working two careers and making time for family and community is no problem for Carmen Mormino, a resident of Westlake Village.

The real estate agent and actor, who has appeared on television and in feature films, said he enjoys every moment of his busy life.

"I'm living my dream right now. I just plan to keep working hard to take care of my family and help people with my real estate and acting," Mormino said.

In addition to early morning workouts at the gym and icehockey practices, Mormino dedicates most of his free time to his wife, MaryLee, and daughters Mia, 11, and Lola, 8.

He volunteers at two schools to share his acting skills with aspiring young performers. He assistant directed the 2010 Westlake Elementary School production of "Gepetto & Son" and helped the choral instructor at Colina Middle School with a recent presentation of "Alice in Wonderland."

His daughters are students at the two schools: Mia at Colina and Lola at Westlake.

"I love working with kids because they like to explore. Kids don't have any inhibition, and they just pretend and make it real," said Mormino, who will help with a performance of "Aladdin" this spring at Westlake Elementary.

The Chicago native moved to California 22 years ago to develop his acting skills and pursue a career in show business. Early on he landed a role on the hit TV series "ER."

"ER' opened a lot of doors for me," Mormino said.

Since then he's appeared in numerous television shows, including "Days of Our Lives," "Criminal Minds" and "Grey's Anatomy."

He's also had roles in theatrical plays and independent movies and has been cast in feature films such as "The Stepfather," "Odd Couple II" and "One Hour Photo."

In the 2002 "One Hour Photo," Mormino portrays one of two police officers who apprehend a lonely photo lab technician who's obsessed with a young suburban family.

The lab technician was portrayed by actor Robin Williams.

Mormino said he was impressed with Williams because he's a genuine talent and a truly caring individual.

"He's an absolute incredible gentleman. He's so talented and two steps ahead of everybody."

Mormino said another highlight of his career was when he and his daughter Mia were cast together in a 2008 festival film called "Shattered."

"She played my daughter; it was one of the most magical scenes I remember," he said.

As a parent and volunteer, Mormino said he aspires to nurture creativity and encourage children to pursue their own passion.

The young pupils also teach him to grow as an actor.

"(The children) teach me more than any acting coach ever could simply because they know how to make believe without any fear of getting it right or wrong," he said.

According to Mormino, most actors in Hollywood try to be what someone else wants them to be, but it's important to stay true to oneself.

"As an actor, I have been rejected over 1,000 times at auditions, and it made me a stronger person," he said.

Frank LaGuardia, choir teacher at Westlake Elementary, said Mormino is an excellent acting coach.

"He's very personable, and he works really well with the kids," LaGuardia said.

Mormino uses his own experience as a professional actor to help children understand the role of the characters they play.

"He has a good attitude toward teaching young children the fun part about the arts. He is very patient. . . . He takes the time to listen to their thoughts and really work with them," LaGuardia said.

He added that Mormino and his wife have been helping at local schools for several years.

MaryLee Mormino said her husband is passionate about family, work and community. He wants to instill confidence in others. When working with kids, his greatest reward is the look on their faces when they finally "get it," she said.

Most recently, Mormino appeared in the CBS series "CSI" as the manager of a thrift store where body parts were found.

Because acting is an unpredictable business, Mormino branched out and started working in real estate in 2006.

"My wife and girls are the most important things in my entire world. I didn't want to base their security and life on the television industry," Mormino said.

His second career has proved to be a success.

In 2010, Mormino was named top individual producing agent at Rodeo Realty in Westlake Village.

"I put my heart and soul in taking care of a lot of people who referred me to others. But in the meantime my acting and family haven't suffered because I keep a balance," he said.