

Hilarie Burton, Lifetime television showcase artwork of Astor students

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The artistic flair of children from a Rhinebeck art program is receiving attention from a national television audience thanks to a movie starring Pleasant Valley resident and actress Hilarie Burton.

Burton, known for television's "One Tree Hill," stars as an art teacher in a Lifetime cable network holiday movie called "A Christmas Wish."

The opening scene features several paintings, including two with holiday themes, created by students at Astor Services for Children and Families in Rhinebeck who participate in the agency's Expressive Arts Program.

"A Christmas Wish," shown on Nov. 28, will be broadcast again at 2 p.m. on Dec. 22 and at 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve. The movie can also be viewed on www.mylifetime.com.



The painting "Dog on Bed," by a student from the Astor Services for Children and Families Expressive Arts Program, is featured in the Lifetime movie "A Christmas Wish." (Photo: Courtesy photo)

Burton, a strong supporter of Astor, whose involvement with the organization runs deep, sent the following tweet on Nov. 28: "Best part of the kid art in #AChristmasWish? Our producer extraordinaire Daniel Lewis suggested we reach out to @AstorServices and get some of our kids here in NY to create art for the movie. It meant so much to me."

Burton could not be reached for comment. And the Astor students were unavailable to comment because of privacy issues.

But Sonia Barnes-Moorhead, executive vice president of The Children's Foundation of Astor, said in a press release that, "The children served by Astor's Expressive Arts Program are thrilled to have some of their artwork included in 'A Christmas Wish.' We are deeply humbled that Hilarie carried her support for Astor onto the small screen this holiday season."

The attention that the paintings are getting on television marks the latest effort involving Burton to showcase Astor, which since 1953 has provided behavioral and educational services for children, some of whom have suffered trauma and psychiatric illness.



Actress Hilarie Burton in a scene from "A Christmas Wish" on the Lifetime cable network. (Photo: Bonnie Marquette/Courtesy photo)

Burton and her husband, actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan of television's "The Walking Dead," have taken a leading role in coordinating renovations at Astor's Rhinebeck campus and raising money for the work.

The couple's "Ghost Stories" fundraisers for Astor have generated a strong response and featured Dutchess County actors Paul Rudd and Mary Stuart Masterson. The most recent edition of "Ghost Stories," held at UPAC in Kingston in February, raised more than \$140,000.

In addition to Burton, Lifetime's 'A Christmas Wish' stars Tyler Hilton, who also appeared on "One Tree Hill." Hilton performed in the 2019 "Ghost Stories" fundraiser, and he portrayed Elvis Presley in the 2005 film "Walk the Line," which starred Joaquin Phoenix as Johnny Cash.

'A Christmas Wish' is set in the small town of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, according to www.mylifetime.com. That's where a wooden wishing box is placed in a park as a Christmas tradition. Folks write down wishes on a piece of paper and place it in the box - and that sets the stage for the plot.

The painting "Christmas Tree with Gift," by a student from the Astor Services for Children and Families Expressive Arts Program, is featured in the Lifetime movie "A Christmas Wish." (Photo: Courtesy photo)



Speaking in 2017 of the children at Astor and the renovations, Burton said, "We're excited for them to come into a new space and know that every person that worked on it did it because we value them and we value the experience that they're having here and the futures that they're building for themselves."

Burton, Morgan and Rudd show their commitment to the community in another way. All three, along with Rudd's wife, Julie, are among the partners who operate Samuel's Sweet Shop in Rhinebeck, which sits a short walk away from Astor.

The interest that Morgan and Burton have in Astor can be traced to curiosity that the couple had regarding the organization's Route 9 building and what transpired inside. That led them to a friend who was involved with the Families for Astor Committee, a fundraising group.

An informal discussion followed at Samuel's, then a visit by the couple to Astor. That led to Morgan and Burton participating in the inaugural "Ghost Stories."

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