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Saving the Soap Box Derby with a movie from Taft

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Taft, Calif. —

A famous actor with roots in Taft is doing his part to help save an American institution and putting Taft back in the movies at the same time.

It may also spark interest in a different kind of racing in Taft – gravity powered Soap Box Derby cars.

Corbin Bernson is directing *25 Hill*, a story about a man and boy, both devastated by tragedy, who come together to find healing and save the Soap Box Derby.

Bernson got the idea when he read that the real Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio, is in several financial problems. He hopes the movie can help bring attention to the plight and maybe even land a sponsor.

Bernson, the son of Taft Union High School alumnus and well-known soap opera star Jeanne Cooper, is a star in his own right with many roles, most notably as Arnie Becker on *L.A. Law*.

His mother was inducted into the TUHS Hall of Fame last year and his grandparents were longtime Taft residents.

25 Hill a story based on real events.

The real Soap Box Derby was nearly cancelled and is still in dire financial straits.

In Bernson's film, the main characters have both suffered deep wounds from two of the major world events of the century.

It's a story based two people -- a man (Bernson) and boy devastated by personal loss.

Bernson plays Roy, the Chief of the Taft Fire Department who has never been able to get over the death of his son, also a firefighter, who was killed in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

His character is introduced to Trey (Nathan Gamble), a young boy who started working on a soap box derby racer with his father only to have the father, a military reservist, called up to serve in Afghanistan, where he was killed in action.

"You have a half-built car and a half-built kid," Bernson said

Trey's teacher introduces the two and together they resume building the soapbox derby car.

(Bernson's character, it turns out, was the 1970 Soap Box Derby champion.)

Along the way, they find healing and Trey helps save the Soap Box Derby, a piece of Americana for the past 75 years.

You can read more about the movie and its goals at www.25Hill.com.

Bernson was in Taft Sunday scouting locations and meeting with a group of local people to start laying the groundwork for filming in Taft.

Interior filming has been underway in Akron, Ohio, but most of the movie is set in Taft and the exterior shots will be filmed in the Taft area in early June when Bernson can take a break from shooting *Psych*, a series for the USA cable channel.

He said he started thinking about the movie after reading about the plight of the Derby, which has lost major sponsorships and is beset by financial problems that threaten its continued existence.

The name came after a conversation with his mother, who told him about kids racing on 25 Hill Road.

"I said 'That's the name of my movie,'" Bernson said.

Current plans call for shooting in Taft from June 4-13 with a crew of about 25 people, including the actors playing the key roles.

Outdoor racing scenes will be shot and a large fire will be staged, Bernson said.

The movie is being shot on a low budget and its not known if it will get a theatrical release or go to television and DVD.

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