



# Dozens of area students attend red-carpet premiere

By JOE MENDEN - Independent Record - 06/11/09

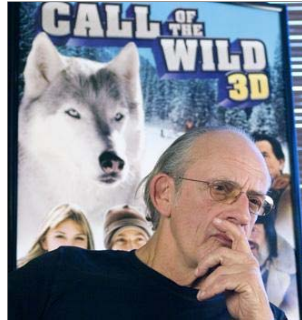
Colter Whelen is only 12 years old, but the C.R. Anderson Middle School student is a big fan of the 1985 film "Back to the Future."

So imagine his surprise when he found out Tuesday that he was chosen to attend Wednesday's red-carpet premiere of "Call of the Wild 3D" and meet its star, Christopher Lloyd — famous for his role as Doc Brown in "Back to the Future."

"I know a lot of older classical movies," Colter, who was there with his parents, Paul and Laloni, said when asked how he became a fan of a film that was popular more than a decade before he was born.

Colter even brought his copy of the "Back to the Future" soundtrack for Lloyd to sign.

Colter was one of dozens of starstruck students from Helena, Lincoln and Phillipsburg schools nominated by their teachers to attend the premiere event at the Great Northern Carousel and the Cinemark theaters Wednesday.



Lisa Kunkel Independent Record - Christopher Lloyd talks about his role in 'Call of the Wild 3D' Wednesday afternoon during an interview with the Independent Record at the Great Northern Town Center.

Wednesday's event was by invitation only, but the film opens to the general public in Helena today. The film doesn't open nationally until Friday.

"Call of the Wild" was filmed on location last winter in Lincoln, Phillipsburg and Helena. The premiere was held here as a way to thank the three towns for their hospitality during filming.

Director Richard Gabai said the film was made on a shoestring budget, and looking back, he doesn't think he could have made it anywhere else because of the cooperation he got from the state of Montana and the town of Lincoln, and especially the family of the late Rollie Fisher, who died last month after a battle with cancer.

"He opened up his home to us," Gabai said. "He let a 40-person film crew take over his house for a week."

Gabai said Fisher's death happened too close to the opening to acknowledge him in the credits, but all future prints will indicate that the movie is dedicated to him.

Young Shelton Snyder of Lincoln was among the guests Wednesday. He and his friend Alex Fischer were extras in the movie.

"I know my lines by heart, but I can't remember them now," a nervous Snyder said Wednesday.

Lloyd owned a home in Darby in the 1980s, and said coming back to make the movie and for Wednesday's premiere was a nice perk of the job.

"Flying in yesterday and seeing the countryside, it made me think, 'It would be nice to be here again,'" Lloyd said. "I really do like it."

Ashley DeLuca, 15, of Lincoln was at the premiere with her mother, Sheri, and younger sisters Katie and Carley. The family members watched some of the movie's filming — if you look closely you might see them in the sled-racing scenes — and Ashley got to meet and play cards with the actors during breaks.

Lloyd did most of his work for the film in Lincoln, and he said the town couldn't have been more welcoming, keeping hotels and restaurants open late for the actors and crew.

The movie is an adaptation of the book by the same name, but it doesn't tell the same story as the Jack London classic. Instead, it is set in modern-day Montana and tells the story of a city girl, played by Ariel Gade, 12, who comes to live with her grandfather, played by Lloyd, in remote Montana with no television, Internet or other modern amenities.

The girl becomes attached to an injured dog, Buck, which reminds her of Buck from London's book.

Lloyd said he and Gade developed a great rapport, and he was impressed by her maturity as an actress at such a young age. He said that in the movie's emotional scenes — when she was faced with the possibility of never again seeing the dog she loved so much — she didn't just pretend to be affected emotionally, she was affected.

"She was incredible," Lloyd said. "She had an extraordinary ability to emotionally connect with the situations her character was in."

"She becomes involved in the story of Buck in Jack London's book and the Buck who's turned up in her real life and joining them together and drawing conclusions about the values that come out in the two stories. I think it really melds, really comes together well."

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Lloyd said everywhere he goes he meets people of all ages who were touched by "Back to the Future" — some of whom say it even changed their lives.

"It's about discovery, different time periods," he said. "(Doc is) just constantly trying out different things. He's full of excitement and adventure. That's kind of universal."

Kayleigh White, 10, of Helena's Kessler Elementary, was there with her mom, Sharon Skates, and her cousin, Julie Rizzo, of Arkansas, also 10. Neither girl knew who Lloyd was nor ever heard of "Back to the Future." But that didn't mute their excitement about meeting the star.

Wright even had Lloyd sign her cell phone.

"I've never met a celebrity before," Wright gushed. "My mom read the note that said Christopher Lloyd was going to be here. I said, 'Is that a celebrity?' She said, 'Yes.' And I said, 'Whoa!'"

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**Curmudgeon** wrote on Jun 11, 2009 11:45 AM:  
" I'm a Helena native, currently an expatriate in Los Angeles. When it opens in LA, wild horses couldn't keep me away --- looking forward to seeing my beloved L & C County on the big screen. "

**Hiedi Handford** wrote on Jun 11, 2009 5:05 AM:  
" This movie was GREAT - I got to see it at the premiere last night. I truly hope Montana citizens go to this show and support the efforts of so many people who came together to make it all possible. And dedicating it to Rollie - well - that's just perfect. He would be honored.

I loved how they got in so many shots of Fleisher Pass - and small town life. Not to mention Race to the Sky! It is simply fantastic people - and you're missing a classic if you don't see it. The 3D effects were amazing..... "

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