

Story of Paul goes to big screen

Alpine civic leader wrote script, plays biblical role

By **Leonel Sanchez** Union-Tribune Staff Writer



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Around East County Mark Price is known as an Alpine school board trustee, a planning group member and civic leader at large.

But around the country the bearded, baritone-voiced Price is known as the actor who portrays biblical characters on stage, mainly at churches. He's been doing it for 25 years.

"I've been wearing the same sandals since 1984," he said.

Price, 52, will make his big-screen debut next Saturday when his self-financed film about Paul the Apostle is shown for one day in theaters around the country. Church groups have paid to reserve seats for their members for the 10 a.m. showing of "One Body, Many Parts – St. Paul in His Own Words."

Saint Therese of Carmel Parish in Carmel Valley, where the performance was filmed in November, has reserved 250 seats at the AMC La Jolla 12 next Saturday. The public is invited to free screenings at 10 a.m. at the Regal Parkway Plaza in El Cajon and Edwards Mira Mesa Stadium 18 in Mira Mesa, courtesy of Mark Price Ministries.

Price, who is Roman Catholic, wrote the script and plays the fiery early Christian missionary in the 90-minute one-man performance.

He said the Bible was his main source for the role, but he also relied on history and theology books. His goal was not to say his portrayal is the right one, but to give a credible performance and get people interested in learning more about a key figure in the Bible, he said.

"If you're a churchgoer, you've been hearing from Paul almost every Sunday and maybe asked yourself, 'Who is this guy we've been hearing from?'" Price said. "I would hope that the film and the portrayal will motivate and inspire people to learn a little more."

As Paul, he recounts key events in the life of the evangelist. Included are his early persecution of Christians, his conversion on the road to Damascus, his letters and spreading of the Gospel to Gentiles, his beatings, imprisonment and execution.

"For people of Christian faith, Paul is such an important and foundational figure," Price said. "His letters are the oldest documents we have that talk about Jesus."

Price runs his ministry while balancing his time as an Alpine school board member and, until recently, a planning group member. He did not seek re-election in November.

He was also one of the driving forces behind the successful passing of a \$417 million bond measure to improve Grossmont district high schools and build a new one in the Alpine area. He was chairman of an advisory group that recommended a bond measure.

Price, a San Diego native, began his ministry in 1975 when he was 19. He said he had been wanting to play Paul since he started portraying biblical characters.

He decided to take on the role last year and got the idea to turn it into a film after church leaders he met on his travels told him they were looking for ways to celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the apostle's birth. Pope Benedict XVI last year declared the Year of Paul would run from June 29, 2008, through June 29, 2009.

Price chose to show the film Jan. 24 because the next day is the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. He also created a discussion workbook for the film.

Price began acting at an early age in school and community productions. His mother, the late Mary Anne Price, was a stage actress who founded a children's theater in San Diego in the 1960s.

Price, who graduated from Mount Miguel High School in Spring Valley, is married to the former Pattie Watson and said his in-laws influenced his decision to play biblical characters.

His father-in-law is Coy Watson, 96, an Alpine resident who comes from a family of former child actors who appeared in silent films and later talkies. The Watson family received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1999.

Coy Watson's brother, the late Bobs Watson, was best known for playing Pee Wee in the 1938 film "Boys Town" with Spencer Tracy. He later became a Methodist minister.

"He's the one who inspired me," Price said. He remembers watching Bobs Watson playing biblical characters at his church in the Los Angeles area.

"He said 'Mark, you're in ministry and you're in theater. Why don't you figure out a way to put the two together?'" Price said.

Price has since played Judas Iscariot, Simon Peter, Doubting Thomas and Saint Joseph to mostly church audiences in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

He was able to take his act on the road because of his frequent business trips as an advertising executive.

"When I knew I was going to be in a city I called churches and told them I'd be in town," he said.

In 2007, he logged 243 performances, he said.

Past performances have been videotaped, he said, but for Paul he hired Coronado-based Jeremy Sykes Film & Television, which used seven high-definition cameras, he said.

Those who viewed the live presentation were impressed, said the Rev. Nick Dempsey, pastor at Saint Therese of Carmel Parish.

"He made Paul come alive as a character," he said.

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