

By Jan Schultz The Imperial Republican

In less than two weeks, the nationwide opening of the "Heaven is for Real" movie arrives.

The fact that the Imperial Theatre is one of the theatres that acquired the film for its opening day release on April 16 is bringing some of the national anticipation home.

Members of Todd Burpo's church, Crossroads Wesleyan, where he is pastor, holds some special anticipation.

"They are all excited and anxious to see it," said church member Norma Dannatt.

She was among several from the Imperial community who were able to see one of the early screenings of "Heaven is for Real" in Denver.

"I can't wait to see the finished product," she said.

Dannatt has also coordinated the workers for all 10 showings of the movie at the volunteer-run Imperial Theatre.

All nights and one matinee are have been filled with workers from the church and community, she said.

"Heaven is for Real" will be shown in Imperial April 16-20, with two showings on April 16 and two on Easter Sunday, one being a 3 p.m. matinee.

The movie is also booked the following weekend, April 25-27, during the regular show time hours.

In anticipation of the movie's release, the Burpos will take part in a series of national interviews that will include appearances by Todd, Sonja and Colton on such programs NBC's "The Today Show" and Mike Huckabee's show on Fox News.

Todd Burpo, who has seen the finished product with his family, said again that the movie portrays Imperial in a very good light.

Enough so, he believes that portrayal will lead people from other parts of the state and country to come here to see the community first-hand.

"Director Randall Wallace has portrayed Imperial in a good manner," Burpo said this week.

However, since the movie was not filmed here, Imperial will not look the same, he said.

And, there may be a scene or two that doesn't reflect how things really work here, he added, such as one involving the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department.

Burpo said he and his family were surprised when a scene features he and Sonja sitting in lawn chairs on top of a fire truck while their children, Colton and Cassie, play in the cab of the truck.□

"This, or course, wouldn't happen here normally. We were kind of surprised" with that switch in the scenes, he smiled.

His favorite scene from the movie is one in which his character, played by actor Greg Kinnear, is speaking with a woman in the cemetery, whose son has died. She is upset.

She feels bad about how part of her is broken. Their conversation, Burpo said, reveals that everyone struggles at times with their faith.

"The movie is very honest about how we all struggle with that," he said.

He commended Director Randall Wallace for his work on making that real, as well as how Imperial is portrayed.

The pre-release screenings across the country are getting good reviews, Burpo said, and Sony Pictures is "very encouraged."

Travis Wheeler benefit

The city theatre board has approved the donation of half of all concessions to the Travis Wheeler family during the weekend Friday, Saturday, Sunday showing, April 18-20, of "Heaven is for Real" at the Imperial Theatre.

People will also have the opportunity to make free will donations if they choose that weekend, Dannatt noted.

Travis' father, Bruce Wheeler, is a former projectionist at the Imperial Theatre. The Wheelers are members of Crossroads Wesleyan Church.

Travis is battling Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL). He underwent a bone marrow transplant in January.