

Building Bridges



This multi-award-winning actor has played many roles. Among them: an easily recognizable entertainer, a devoted member of his famous family and now, an ardent eco-crusader. He's **BEAU BRIDGES**, a SoCal native who has chosen to make the Valley his home.

BY DEBORAH SHADOVITZ

've come to this Hidden Hills home to talk to one of its residents, Beau Bridges, about his impressive acting career, his life in the Valley and his work to preserve our area's wildlife.

This house emits a harmonious ambiance, with its heavy wooden and leather furnishings and obvious warmth. Bridges has lived here with his family for 20 years.

"What I love about this area," Beau said, "is that it's butted up against what is really the only natural corridor that links the two big mountain ranges that come through California. Because of that, you have just about every wild animal you can imagine. There are eagles and condors, mountain lions and raccoons... Everything, just right over that little hill."

He gestures out his large back window toward a large yard back-dropped by natural woods.

Bridges doesn't simply enjoy living by the California coast – he also takes an active role in preserving the land and its heritage. While sitting on the board of Wishtoyo (Wishtoyo.org), a

nonprofit Chumash environmental group, he successfully lobbied against the Ahmanson Ranch project, a proposed community that would have been built north of Agoura.

"Wishtoyo," Bridges said, "is really a wonderful group. I've enjoyed being a part of it. It has a lot of people on the board who have been part of the environmental effort for a long time, and a group of lawyers to take on some of the oil companies that are drilling on the coast and screwing up the environment."

Our local coast also ties into Beau's acting career. He didn't become an actor simply because

his father, Lloyd Bridges, was one. In the Mar Vista neighborhood he grew up in, his parents maintained a large circle of diverse friends in all types of industries. But one summer back in the 1940s, Beau's dad and several of his friends, some of them actors, somehow obtained a prefab shack, then "bought land on the beach up around the Ventura county line, and put the shack up out there" amidst the sand dunes. Bridges laughs when recalling how there was no water or electricity, then demonstrates how they'd crank the telephone to make a call.

Director Lewis Milestone also built a shack there, "but his was a lit-



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tle nicer, more sophisticated dwelling." Milly, as the Bridges called him, got to know young Beau, then gave him one of his first roles in *The Red Pony*, which came out in 1949, when Beau was just eight years old.

In his twenties, after college, Beau did some of what he calls "street theater" to get in front of audiences. I used to perform in prisons and hospitals and on street corners. Just throw friends together and do it. I used to get a flatbed truck with a microphone and a speaker system and just drive into parking lots to put on shows."

Since then, he's appeared on film or TV every year since he was 19. He has won three Emmys, and been nominated for 11, including one for his role as Earl's father in the hit comedy *My Name is Earl*.

"I was supposed to do some more of playing Earl's dad, but I haven't been able to do it because of the writer's strike," he said. Discussing his work these days, thoughts always go back to the strike – and to the internet's evolution: "One of the things that I think is healthy is that the strike has caused me

to reach out and communicate and make a living in my business beyond the normal way. I'm really getting back to what I did when I was younger."

Fascinated with the internet as a form of communication, Bridges said, "I think TV as we know it, the cable and the networks, is a dead horse. I think it's just a matter of time before it's gone. It's already happening. And that's what the challenge is for these folks to figure out. They're trying to lay down financial rules... I don't think there are any bad guys because we're all part of the same industry. But the thing that remains is that before there can be a show, you have to have the creative people there to do it. The corporate people can't do it. So in the end they're going to have to figure out how to make it all happen and keep the creative side happy enough to do what they do."

As he looks at other performance possibilities, he reflects on what he learned about marketing and audience-building while playing P. T. Barnum (for an A&E TV movie) – his aim now is to teach via entertainment;



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acting, he believes, is a way to pass on information.

His secret to being an effective actor? Research. "My dad was my teacher and he told me that the most important element of telling a story is that you're coming from some truth. Be it just your own truth or whatever. It doesn't have to be everybody's truth. But you have to come from a spot that you believe."

But he's not entirely art- or career-driven. "The most important part of myself," he said, "is how I relate to my family as a father and as a husband. My career springs from all that. My family really inspires me and my

work, so it's all kind of rolled up in one, really."

With his upcoming projects (more *Stargate*, plus a comedy called *Dirty Politics* and a drama called *Don't Fade Away*, among others), we'll be seeing a lot more of Beau Bridges in the near future.

And because he's one of our local boys, you may just run into him while he's out and about in his Valley life; these days, he's sure to be either spending quality time with family, working, fighting for eco-justice or just enjoying his nature-inspired home. ♦