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Giving Up the Hollywood Lifestyle

Lafayette native comes home to simpler roots

By Diane Claytor



Still of Michael Chiklis, Vinessa Shaw, Ivana Milicevic and Michael Wiseman in "Vegas" Photo celebrityimages.org

Michael Wiseman could not wait to leave Lafayette. His father was born and raised here. His grandfather was co-owner of a local restaurant. His mother taught at Burton Valley Elementary School for 35 years. But Wiseman wanted out. "I was just one of those kids that wanted to get out of the house," he explained. Shortly after his high school graduation, he left.

Fast forward 20 years. Wiseman, an actor living in Los Angeles, could not wait to move back. And now, five years later, Wiseman, who unabashedly talks about how happy he is to be back in his hometown, could easily be the poster child for the 'Love Lafayette' campaign. "There's something very special about this town," he said. "It has magic."

Wiseman is the grandson of Sol Wiseman, who owned Wiseman's Furniture and Appliance stores in the East Bay and, with Jay Bedsworth, owned The Tunnel Inn, a popular Lafayette steakhouse in the 1930s and '40s. The Mt. Diablo Boulevard restaurant (now Pet Food Express) is said to have attracted diners from as far away as San Francisco. In 1959, The Tunnel Inn was sold to Petar Jakovina, who changed its name to Petar's and eventually moved his restaurant to Lafayette Circle. Wiseman's father, raised on Wildwood Lane, graduated from Acalanes High School. Wiseman himself attended Burton Valley Elementary, Stanley Middle School and Campolindo High School.

The trail away from Lafayette proved to be successful, although hectic and stressful, which is what eventually brought Wiseman home, seeking a simpler life. He headed to Southern California and, determined to be an actor, began doing theater and seriously studying the art. He met the appropriate people, made the appropriate connections and soon began getting jobs.

One of his first roles was a cop in "Predator 2" (1990), starring Danny Glover and Gary Busey; his first TV role was portraying a ball player in a 1992 episode of "Cheers." Another 60 roles followed, all listed on Wiseman's imbd.com page, including stints in "Star Trek: Voyager," "The X-Files," "CSI: Miami," and "Scorpion." He had recurring roles in "NYPD Blue," "Boston Legal" and "The Closer." In 2012, Wiseman had

a "life changing" role: he played the main bad guy, Johnny Rizzo, in "Vegas," working with Dennis Quaid and Michael Chiklis.

Finding his old Burton Valley yearbook recently, Wiseman laughingly reported that his stated goal was becoming a famous actor. He admits there is no one way to get into acting and the road is certainly not easy. "I worked and worked, studied and studied," he said. "You think you'll get a job, be successful and then be able to live in your mansion at the beach." He kept getting jobs, although, he acknowledged, there were definitely lulls. "There was a two or three year period where I could barely get a role," he noted.

While at a party in Los Angeles, Wiseman met Caroline Keenan, a part-time actress and, to help support herself, a hairstylist. According to Wiseman, Keenan had studied with some of the best hairdressers in Hollywood and began getting celebrity clientele. She was soon working as a hair and makeup stylist for photo shoots and on TV and movie sets, winning both accolades and awards.

Wiseman and Keenan married and had two daughters, Dalilah and Olivia. With both parents working long and often erratic hours, the girls were basically being raised by their nanny – a fact that did not appeal to either parent. Keenan-Wiseman noted that they would visit Lafayette to see family every year and "it was always like a little dream. I often thought that maybe one day we could live in a place like that," she said.

That day came almost five years ago. Keenan-Wiseman found herself out of a job and within two weeks, not only was the decision made to leave LA but the car was packed and the family heading north. "Caroline's dream was always to be a mom, raise the kids, have a simple life. We finally decided that if we're going to do it, we just needed to stop thinking about it and do it," Wiseman explained.

They have never looked back. Wiseman commutes to Los Angeles on a regular basis. He just completed filming two independent films, one with Sharon Stone. Keenan-Wiseman continued as a hairdresser, initially renting a station at a local salon. When the salon went up for sale, the Wiseman's bought it and the very popular Caroline's Salon was born. Keenan-Wiseman was recently named best stylist and hair colorist in Diablo Magazine's 2015 Best of the East Bay. Needing more space, the "upscale salon with a neighborhood feel" recently moved above Chow in Lafayette.

Wiseman admits that although the hope was for a simpler life, that hasn't actually occurred. "But our family life is leaps and bounds better and far happier. And I've come full circle," Wiseman stated proudly. "I look out my office window and can see the neighborhood where my dad grew up. I can see the location where, conceptually, my grandfather worked. My daughters are attending the same schools I attended. I love every bit of being a local Lafayette resident."



"Vegas" stars Michael Wiseman, Jonathan Banks, Jimmy Russo and Michael Chiklis Photo provided



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