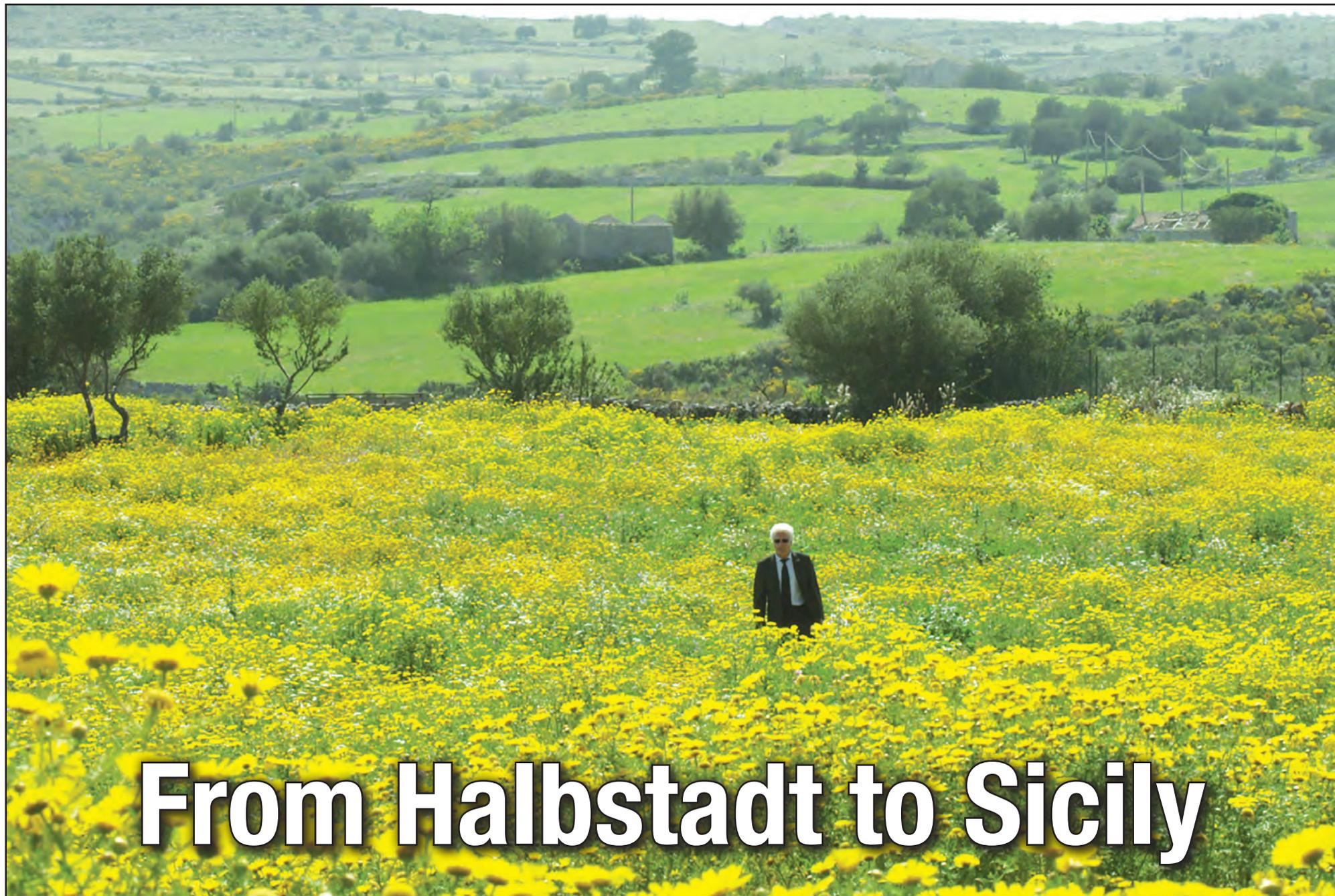


# The Red River Valley Echo

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## From Halbstadt to Sicily

Supplied Photo

A new movie written, produced and directed by former Halbstadt resident Dale Hildebrand will be making its debut on the big screen on Labour Day weekend. Road to the Lemon Grove is a heartwarming comedy which focuses on an old-world Sicilian father trying to negotiate his way into Heaven. See page 2 and 3.



# A movie for the intelligent heart

➤ From Manitoba to the Big Screen, Hildebrand produces film that will tug at your heart.

**Lori Penner**  
Red River Valley Echo

Time flies when you're having fun. It's been quite a while since Dale Hildebrand graced the stage during W.C. Miller Collegiate's high school drama productions. He says that's where he got his taste for theatre and entertainment. Fast forward 40 years, and now he's an award-winning writer, director and produc-

er anticipating the opening of his internationally-acclaimed independent film, *Road to the Lemon Grove*.

This heartwarming comedy focuses on an old-world Sicilian father trying to negotiate his way into Heaven. The only way to achieve his goal to enter Heaven is to go back and repair his relationship with his reluctant son.

He must get his son to reunite their feuding family, and help all find love in places they never imagined.

The film is a funny, yet touching look at the loss of culture and identity that can only be rekindled by reconnecting with the heart of who we are.

Hildebrand describes it as a story for the intelligent heart.

His own connections run deep in South-

ern Manitoba, growing up in the village of Halbstadt near Altona.

"When I was just finishing school I went to the Philippines on an exchange program. I really grew up during that trip and it gave me a lot of inspiration for the arts. Later, as I travelled, I ended up in Edmonton where I was doing some music and video production, and I sort of stumbled on filmmaking that way."

He went on to attend four years of film school at York University in Toronto, and continued on in the film industry, creating films like *T O in 2 4*, earning 28 international awards, three Gemini nominations, and a Gemini win.

He's also worked as a cinematographer, embedded behind enemy lines in Afghani-

stan for the feature film *Hyena Road*.

"Paul Gross, myself and two other guys shot all the footage deep in Taliban territory and it was absolutely an experience of a lifetime. Paul is a wonderful human being and a great Canadian, and we had a great experience shooting that."

His recent movie, *Road to Lemon Grove*, was shot in Canada and Sicily, and has already earned Best Comedy Feature of Edmonton International Film Festival, Cirs Award at the Taormina Film Festival for Best in Cultural and Social Achievement in Sicily, Italian Contemporary Film Festival - Best in Italian-Canadian Cinema, Italian Contemporary Film Festival - the Excellence in Performance Award.

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**Continued from Pg. 2**

The film also boasts a number of high profile actors like Rocky alumnus Burt Young and Nick Mancuso who is a veteran actor with more than 300 films to his name. Former Morden resident and acclaimed singer Loreena McKennitt also lends her talents to the film as the voice of God.

“Some people refer to it as “My Big Fat Italian Funeral” because it sort of has that feel of the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding”. It’s a reconciliation story between families, but there’s also a strong immigration story there as well. When Italians came to Canada, they were not looked upon fondly. They were not even allowed to congregate on street corners. They have since then become huge contributors and builders of the foundation of this country, and now they are reconnecting with their roots. It’s a great story for the current immigrant story. They have already travelled that route, and now they are reconnecting with a deeper past.”

Hildebrand also uses his film to honour the various cultures, and in his own way, leave a legacy.

“There’s something like 7,000 languages in the world right now. And they say in the next 100 years, 90 per cent of them will be lost. We’re not just losing language, we’re losing culture and our identity. The main character in the movie loses his father, and he needs to reconnect with his past and his culture. He needs to find value in who he was and who he is.”

The film is intensely personal to Hildebrand, as his own father died the day the film went into pre-production.

“Six or seven other crew members also lost their fathers during the making of this movie, so it became very meaningful to all of us. We pay homage to our fathers at the end of the film.”

“There’s a lot of love stories out there. This film is about reconnecting the love between father and son, and recreating an appreciation. That sort of thing gets lost, and to be able to find that again is very important, as an individual and as a society.”

Hildebrand says he hopes the biggest takeaway from the film is the idea of family appreciation.

“That and the concept of touching the earth. I think that’s very important to me and for these characters. Our main character may have a lot of wisdom, but he never really touched the earth where he came from and connected that loop. It’s really about appreciating your roots.”

Road to the Lemon Grove is opening in 16 cities across Canada on Labour Day weekend.

In Winnipeg it will be opening on Friday, August 30 at the Polo Park Cineplex.

To view the trailer, go to <https://vimeo.com/263320354>