



Photo courtesy of Jenna Ciralli

Jenna Ciralli, writer, producer, creator and actress for the short film “Willow Creek Road” is pictured sitting on a bench at Mallard’s Rest Campground in Paradise Valley. The film’s crew, based in Montana and New York, will return to the location in April to shoot scenes for the film.

Former Montanan plans film with local connection

By Jasmine Hall
Enterprise Staff Writer

At Mallard’s Rest Campground, located outside Livingston off the U.S. Highway 89 South, a lone bench sits overlooking the Yellowstone River and offers a view of the majestic Absaroka Mountains against a backdrop of vast Montana skies.

The bench, and its view, will be just one Paradise Valley location featured in the Montana Big Sky Film Grant recipient and Columbia University film, “Willow Creek Road,” which is scheduled to film in both Paradise and Gallatin valleys for five days in July.

“The Paradise Valley is one of the beautiful places in Montana,” Jenna Ciralli, who is the creator, producer, writer and actress for “Willow Creek Road” said in a phone interview Friday. “... The Gallatin and Paradise valleys are gifts that continue to give visually.”

The story follows two women living on a rural road in Montana. The two Montana characters — Joey, a mother of two, and Ruth, a lonely housewife who’s been unsuccessful in attempts to have children — share an unusual story.

“(Ruth) carries this painful secret in her back pocket and becomes obsessed with her next-door neighbor, Joey,” Ciralli said. “She perceives (Joey) as being neglectful — a reckless free spirit.”

The story line follows Ruth as she integrates into the role of mother after she picks up Joey’s children from school.

“Ruth slowly develops this fantasy of taking care of Joey’s children and helping them in a way she thinks her neighbor is falling short,” Ciralli said.

Vital to the story is Montana, with the state’s beauty and setting central to the film as a representation of women’s relationship of desire for each other’s



Photo courtesy of Jenna Ciralli

Jenna Ciralli, a New York-based actress, producer and writer and a former Montana resident, is pictured in this undated photo.

lives.

“The character of Montana in our film is about light, and space, and long stretches of road, and huge mountains and plains for days,” Ciralli said. “It’s a natural backdrop for the setting of these two women and their relationships to one another, and longing, and their secrets ... I think it’s a beautiful juxtaposition of inner life and outer life.”

A core team, including its director, producer, cinematographer and assistant director, are from New York and Colombia universities, and the group has teamed with a Montana-based crew and cast of local Montana actors to create the film.

Ciralli said the film was chosen for the grant because of this New York and Montana effort.

“What we offered was a blend of Montana crew and New York crew,”

Ciralli said. “And we could offer the Columbia University and NYU side of excellence to local cast and crew in Montana.”

Ciralli also said she believes her film was chosen because of its unique representation of women in film.

“I think we’re part of the movement that wants to see more complex women on screen and tell fresh stories of women,” she said. “Because I think we really just hit the tip of the iceberg in cinema.”

Although there is a Willow Creek Road located north of Livingston off Old Clyde Park Road, Ciralli said the road will not be featured in the film.

Instead the film was titled “Willow Creek Road” because it reminds Ciralli, a Brooklyn resident and formerly of Great Falls, of her Montana home and connects her to the state.

Willow Creek holds a special importance to her because it was the name of her uncle’s Montana ranch, located outside White Sulphur Springs, and she also lived in Willow Creek, Montana, for a period of time.

Ciralli said the title is also meaningful to her because “Willow” was the name of her childhood cat and the name of her Great Falls 4-H club.

“I think it’s part of the Montana vernacular,” she said of the title. “Both an image you see visually of the willows and then also it comes up in nomenclature of cities and roads.”

So far, the Mallard’s Rest bench is the only scheduled Paradise Valley and Livingston film location, but since the script is still evolving, Ciralli said more Park County locations might be added.

“I’m not sure what (locations) specifically,” Ciralli said. “But we might have some downtown shots. I think Livingston still has that old cowgirl, cowboy identity that people once associated with Bozeman.”

To help pay expenses not covered under the Big Sky Film Grant, Ciralli is still hoping to raise funds for the New York crew’s stipend, travel, pre-production costs, location security and other related Montana filming expenses.

To learn more about the film or to donate to help cover “Willow Creek Road” expenses, visit www.indiegogo.com/projects/willow-creek-road-short-