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**“THE BIGGEST LITTLE FARM” WITH LOCAL CONNECTIONS
RETURNS TO DELMARVA ON MARCH 9
DURING “FAMILY FUN DAY AT THE MOVIES”**

OCEAN CITY, MD — Feb. 21, 2025 — A highlight of the 9th Annual Ocean City Film Festival is the return of two local all-stars with their film, *The Biggest Little Farm*. Director John Chester and Producer Erica Messer, both graduates of Stephen Decatur High School, will be live on stage sharing behind-the-scenes commentary on Sunday, March 9, during “Family Fun Day at the Movies” at the Ocean City Performing Arts Center.

Tickets to the movie are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door, with children 14 and under admitted for free with a paid adult. Tickets are included with the 4-Day Film Festival pass and the one-day Sunday pass. Passes are available at OCMDFilmFestival.com.

The Biggest Little Farm is a feature-length film that chronicles the epic eight-year story of Apricot Lane Farms, the regenerative farm Chester and his wife Molly started in 2011. The movie has a spin-off book and will soon debut as a new TV series, with trailers screening at the Film Festival event at the PAC.

As young adults, both Chester and Messer were active in the theater and communications departments at SDHS, leading them to award-winning careers in film.

John Chester

Chester is the director of *The Biggest Little Farm*, a film about his journey to establish and run a sustainable farm in California. The great-grandson of the late Dr. Francis Townsend, Chester was born in Baltimore but spent his early childhood on Talbot St. in downtown Ocean City above what was Fishers Pharmacy. The quirky cast of real-life characters that surrounded him on the Ocean City Boardwalk sparked his story-telling interest, and he made short films about local icons like Boardwalk Elvis and Shorty The Blind Banjo Player, among others.

“For me, Ocean City was full of these lovable, bigger-than-life characters,” Chester said. “They made my childhood feel magical.”

Chester graduated from SDHS in 1990. Inspired by teachers Gwendolyn Lehman and Terry Sterner, he started the high school TV station and created a local weekly news show, *OC Live*, produced entirely by local teens, that developed a strong cult following. Lehman encouraged him to take psychology to better understand human behavior and develop his skills as a writer. She never had any doubt that Chester would do something great.

“John knew who he was from day one,” Lehman said. “He was very focused, very mature, very outgoing, very enterprising. He was an enormous help to me as a teacher.”

In his teens, Chester’s family moved to West Ocean City. He eventually lived and worked on two different farms in Berlin during his early twenties with his brother, Deeley Chester, before moving into a career as an Emmy-award-winning filmmaker and television director.

Erica Cramer Messer

Messer is the Executive Producer of *The Biggest Little Farm*. Born and raised in Washington D.C., she spent her summers playing on the beach at 123rd St. in Ocean City until her parents, Jack and Karen Cramer, moved the family to the resort year round. She and her brothers attended Ocean City Elementary, Berlin Middle School, and Stephen Decatur High School.

In her sophomore year, Messer auditioned for Decatur’s famed Theatre Department and was part of every production until graduation. Messer credits teacher Gwendolyn Lehman as an inspiration for her career.

“Mrs. Lehman’s gift of storytelling and genuine encouragement have been a huge influence in my career,” Messer said.

Lehman, who has known the Cramer family for years, began encouraging Messer at SDHS when she was still too young to join the theater department. Her brothers – and also John Chester and Messer’s future husband, Kenny Messer — were already involved, so she hung around and helped out, “holding the book” for the actors.

“She basically made herself my assistant,” Lehman said. “Erica was always very mature and very responsible and has a quiet authority. She was always much more interested in being behind the scenes than out in front.”

Messer and Chester met in those awkward early days, and both were involved in Decatur’s newly founded Communication Arts department. When summer rolled around, they provided on-camera content for *OC Live* that ran on the access channel from SDHS.

After graduating from Salisbury University, Messer and her husband, Kenny, relocated to Los Angeles to work in the entertainment industry. She started in current drama at FOX before joining the writers’ rooms of series like *Party of Five*, *Alias*, *The OC*, *Charmed*, and *Criminal Minds*. Messer is currently the Showrunner/Executive Producer of *Criminal Minds* and is developing many projects for cable and streaming platforms.

Messer lives with her family in Los Angeles but visits family and friends in Ocean City often.

More information and advance tickets are available at [OCMDFilmFestival](#).