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Finding some S.P. High alumni is no easy task

**By Nancy Needham, Correspondent
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In 1966, "The Sound of Music" wins an Oscar for Best Picture, Ronald Reagan becomes governor and Billie Single is on a small stage at Santa Paula High School dreaming big dreams of someday being a movie star.

Forty years later, the family musical continues to be a favorite, California still has an actor as governor and Billie Single Harsch is now a movie producer who has an acting part in her independent film, "Jupiter Landing."

Harsch is one of the many Santa Paula High alumni expected at the school's 40-year reunion.

"When I was in high school, I always played second to the lead in the musicals," recalled Harsch.

But at her high school reunion, she will be front and center during a screening of her movie. The dark comedy was shot in Utah, where she now resides, and has been shown in various film festivals including the European FilmMart in Berlin and the Park City Film Music Festival in Utah, where it won a Gold Medal Award for its music. The public is also invited to the showing at 10 a.m. Aug. 19 at the Oxnard Plaza Cinema, 255 W. Fifth St.

There is a \$5 admission.

"This is really exciting for me to come back to my high school reunion as a movie producer — it's one of the things I wanted to do right out of high school," said Harsch.

She has a Web site promoting the feature film at <http://www.jupiterlandingthemovie.com>, where those interested in learning more about the movie can see clips, read bios and get more background information on Harsch's endeavor.

Not all of the 283 Cardinal classmates were as easy to find as Harsch, noted Jeff Price, a retired park superintendent who has been in charge of locating long-lost members of their graduating class.

Fortunately, Price was the man for the job. As a park ranger, he was trained in finding lost people and even tracking creatures such as mountain lions.

"I'm glad to say everyone we went searching for we found, but sad to say not everyone was alive," recalled Price.

He put those ranger skills and his determination into finding his classmates. "One time I was tracking a mountain lion and was making plaster casts of its footprints when I heard a rustling in the tree above me," said Price.

When he looked up, he realized the mountain lion had been watching him from a tree branch right above. That wasn't the only time he was surprised doing an investigative search.

For instance, when Price was given the task of looking for his classmates, he was disheartened to find 23 of his former classmates were deceased. In 1966, the Vietnam War was in full swing with some 250,000 troops fighting and every young man issued a draft card. Several of them went to war and were killed.

Mike Snyder, a former Santa Paula High School graduate who played on the basketball and baseball teams, was one of those on the deceased list. After graduation, Snyder had gone to Stanford University and earned a bachelor's degree. Then he was off to Ohio State, where he earned a master's degree in Spanish. In 1972 he joined the Army and was commissioned as an officer in field artillery. Later he went to flight school and became a helicopter pilot with the 101st Airborne Division.

His special skills took him all over the world, including Texas, Oklahoma, Germany, Puerto Rico, Spain, Honduras and Argentina. On his high school's reunion list it noted he had been shot and killed while fighting in Nicaragua, said Price, but he could not find any document verifying the

validity of that statement. So, he kept checking.

When there were no official record of Snyder's death, Price began searching for a living Snyder and was overjoyed to discover his old classmate now living as a retired lieutenant colonel in Florida. "I was stationed in several places and not killed in any of them," said Snyder.

When Snyder learned from Price that he had not only been considered missing in action, but declared dead, he took it with good humor.

"I thought it was funny," said Snyder, who has not decided if he will make the trip to California for the reunion. He did write a note for the reunion program declaring he is alive.

Another tough challenge for Price was finding former foreign exchange student Ximena Ancic, of Chile. She is now a medical doctor and will be flying in from South America to attend the event, said Price.

"I'm lucky she kept her maiden name for her profession or I never would have found her," said Price.

Of the 100 people on the missing list, Price has located 40 or more, he said. Those "found" include Mike Prairie, a law firm partner in San Diego; Alan Mashburn, a city mayor in Utah; and Gordon Onstot, an oil company representative in Kazakhstan, said Price.

— Price is continuing to contact family and friends to network and find the others who are still unaccounted for, he said. Those who might be among them can find out more about the reunion events at <http://www.jprice.net>, where the confirmed reservation list is online, along with information about making reservations for reunion activities that will include a formal dinner and dance and a casual beach party.

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