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Lights, Camera, Action...for Autism

St. Augustine, FL (December 12, 2008)—“What does it take to be the youngest screenwriter in the world? Eleven year-old Keaton Bicknell is determined to find out.

Undeterred by his diagnosis of autism, Keaton will soon be sitting in the director's chair along with professional film makers, former Disney animators, and award-winning authors—all working together on Bicknell's first screenplay ***Pelican Pete: A Bird Is Born.***

Armed with a preliminary script and hundreds of animated drawings for the film, Keaton and his family attended a recent book festival, intent on meeting Frances and Hugh Keiser, author and illustrator of the book on which the movie is based. “I'd like permission for the screen rights to your books,” declared Bicknell. A statement that mother, Pam Bicknell, says is a miracle in many ways.

“When Keaton was diagnosed with autism at age 2, we were told he wouldn't be considered for speech therapy, because he didn't have a high enough IQ to learn to speak. Keaton proved them wrong. Now he's writing scripts, talking with film and publishing executives, and making a movie—and he's only eleven years old! He amazes and inspires me daily,” shares the proud mom.

The young moviemaker has inspired many who continue to donate their time and talent, making Keaton's dream their own. Dominic Carola, former lead animator for Walt Disney's feature film, *Lilo and Stich*, is one. As owner of Premise Entertainment in Orlando, he and his team of animation veterans use their talents to generate positive storytelling content for children all over the world. Cutting-edge production company, Best Friend Films, is also on board, with co-owner Kevin Lang adding, "Keaton's script has legs, and we're going to run with it."

Keaton's interest in the industry is no surprise considering father, Stuart Bicknell, is a veteran on the technical side of filmmaking. "I'm excited that my choice of career has opened up a few doors for my son and that his ideas are being realized.

Further underlining his focus, Keaton and his sister, Samantha, attended the HEAL Film Camp with Director Joey Travolta last summer. The two-week long program, produced by ArtLife Productions, was sponsored by the HEAL Foundation (Healing Every Autistic Life), a Ponte Vedra based non-profit organization. The film camp included 30 children with autism, a spectrum disorder with which Keaton and his family are intimately familiar.

Autism affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others and is on the rise with 1 in every 150 American children diagnosed annually—making it more common than pediatric cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined.

The Bicknells are just one of the many families in St. Augustine living with the effects of autism. Keaton and many others make us aware that the disorder is not a sentence for failure. Pulitzer Prize winners, renowned poets, awarded musicians, and

famous actors have all been diagnosed with the disorder. I think it's safe to say we can add Keaton Bicknell to the long list of success stories.

[Please offset and highlight] A casting call will be held at the Limelight Theatre, 11 Old Mission Avenue, St. Augustine, on Saturday, December 20th at 10:00 AM. Please bring a head shot and arrive early to fill out audition forms. Casting will be for a grandmother, grandfather, girl (age 8-11), and boy (age 8-11). For further information, please contact Jennifer Sellars at 904-471-5376 or Kate Messenger, Limelight Theater at 904- 825-1164.

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