

SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

Drama Kids protégé Caden is on the road to stardom

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Like a lot of children his age, 11-year-old Caden Denslow has big dreams of becoming a famous actor. But unlike those other kids, his aspirations of appearing on the big screen are already taking shape.

The Lakewood Ranch resident has an established profile on the web-based movie database IMDb, works with an agent and has landed roles in nationally recognized films.

He appeared in “No Real Than You,” an award-winning short film produced by Ringling College of Art and Design and selected for the 2014 Cannes Film Festival.

However, it was his first supporting role as a disabled boy named Sammy in the short film “Pierrot,” which focused on the struggles of an alcoholic ex-clown, that earned him recognition at the Sarasota Film Festival in 2013.

Caden studies acting at the Out-Of-Door Academy, the second oldest private school in Florida, which originated on Siesta Key in 1924. When it was created, the founders believed outdoor learning stimulated student brain activity. The school has since expanded to Lakewood Ranch and focuses primarily on liberal arts.

Caden’s love of acting began in Kindergarten, when his ODA class performed a play called “The Little Red Hen.”

“My teacher was the hen and I had so much fun being in front of everybody,” Caden said. “I decided this was my calling.”

The following summer, Caden saw a television advertisement for Drama Kids, a summer camp and local afterschool children’s acting program that teaches fast paced drama activities in order to build speaking, acting and social skills.

After enrolling in the camp, Caden said he gained a level of confidence that allowed him to act through his mistakes and interact with adults without intimidation.

He has been with the program for six years.

“Caden is the kind of creative kid who needs a creative outlet,” said Drama Kids president Tamara Solum. “He loves playing crazy characters and making the audience laugh.”

Besides movies, Caden has performed in several plays. He recently played Rapunzel’s prince in the ODA Middle School’s production of “Into the Woods.”

He recently played the white rabbit in the production of “Alice in Wonderland” at Venice Theatre and has also participated in productions of “Aladdin,” the “Little Mermaid” and “Hairspray.”

Despite his theater background, Caden said he prefers the film



industry. One of his most challenging performances included a distracted driving industry video where he played a child who was killed in a car wreck.

"It just was a very emotional part," Caden said. "It showed how much your family loves you and how they want you to always be safe."

While Caden's focus is currently on acting, he has backup plan for his career in case his string of good luck in the industry fizzles out. If that happens, he wants to be a professional public speaker (he's won several speech contests) or an animal rights lawyer (he has been a vegetarian for the last five years).

Caden isn't the only child star to come out of Drama Kids.

Hannah Swain starred in the short film "Geronimo," where she played a wise teenager who teaches a young boy the importance of family after a near-death experience. Hannah has also appeared in four episodes of the television series "Spirits," a show centered on the macabre.

Her most recent endeavor has been voice work for the character Tweet in the animated series "Ruff-Ruff, Tweet and Dave" which aired this year on the television network Sprout.

So how do these aspiring young actors ascend from Manatee to Hollywood? If you ask Caden, he'll tell you the secret is to get involved in as many local productions as possible and to not sweat the small stuff.



"It's okay to mess up," Caden said. "If you keep going, the audience will never know."

Caden also recommends the Drama Kids program. He said that the skillset you learn in class could be transferred into other creative occupations or circumstances.

"Learning to comfortably speak to adults can work wonders for children hoping to get into acting and help them to be comfortable when they are looking for a job in the future," Caden said. 🙌