

# Prancer

A collage of film-related items including a clapperboard, a film reel, and a film strip against a blue background with bokeh circles. The clapperboard is black and white with fields for PROD., ROLL, SCENE, TAKE, DIRECTOR, CAMERA, and DATE. The film reel is a large, detailed illustration of a film reel with a film strip winding around it. The film strip is a dark grey strip with white sprocket holes, curving across the bottom of the image.

A heartwarming and endearing holiday movie! *Prancer* is a sentimental, tug-at-your-heart story that folks of all ages will love.

Young Jessica Riggs' family has fallen on hard times. Still, she keeps her belief in Santa Claus and the idea that there are miracles in the world alive. When Jessica discovers an injured reindeer in the woods, she believes it is Prancer, one of Santa's reindeer. With the help of a sympathetic veterinarian, Jessica takes care of the wounded creature. It's supposed to be a secret, but eventually a store Santa Claus, the girl's dad, and the entire town find out about Prancer, leading to big problems for Jessica and her family.

*Prancer* stars Rebecca Harrell as Jessica Riggs; Sam Elliott as John Riggs, the father; Abe Vigoda portrays the veterinarian; and Michael Constantine plays the store Santa Claus. Cloris Leachman plays the town's recluse, Mrs. McFarland.

- The movie "Prancer" grossed nearly \$19 million at the box office.
- The film's young lead actress, Rebecca Harrell, garnered a nomination for a Young Artist Award for Best Young Actress Starring in a Motion Picture.
- The movie is set in the little town of Three Oaks, where much of the exterior scenes were shot. Filming also occurred in Indiana and Illinois.



**5 South Elm Street, Three Oaks**

This is the scene where you see workers hanging up the reindeer in town, in preparation for Christmas. Decorations were left hanging at the intersection through March when filming was finished.

As a thank you to the people of Three Oaks, producers gave all the Christmas holiday decorations to the city.

**Wetherby Residence**  
17768 Pardee Road, Galien

In the movie *Prancer*, Jessica's best friend, Carol Wetherby, lived in this home. Carol isn't sure what to think about her friend's sudden obsession with the reindeer but promised to keep Jessica's secret.

This family home was built in 1920 and is situated on 1.5 acres of land.



**Drier's Meat Market**

14 South Elm Street, Three Oaks

Pay a visit to Drier's Meat Market and you may get to meet Carolyn Drier, whose 100-plus-year-old meat market—a national historic site—is featured prominently in the film. Maybe you can even score her autograph on a wrapped ring of homemade bologna.

Here's the reference to Drier's Meat Market in the movie, "The reindeer finally is discovered, and Jessica's dad sells it to Mr. Drier, the local butcher..."



**Christmas Tree Lot**

12 South Elm Street, Three Oaks  
(on the west side of the street between 8 and 14 South Elm Street)

**Vickers Theatre**

6 North Elm Street, Three Oaks

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of *Prancer*, the director held a special public screening at Vickers Theatre.



**Three Oaks United Methodist Church**

2 Sycamore Street East, Three Oaks

This is the site of *Prancer* magic. Santa's reindeer, and the recent movie carrying his name, added special meaning to this Christmas for United Methodists in Three Oaks. For one long day, this church was turned into a movie set. Church members, including the choir, were among the many people recruited as extras.



## Second Wind

### 13 South Elm Street, Three Oaks

The sign on the window says it all, “Random Things & Hidden Treasures.” During the filming of *Prancer*, this colorful building was the local tap room called the Village Pump. It was quite the popular hangout for stars Sam Elliott, Abe Vigoda, and other film crew and production staff.

Stop in and hunt for all kinds of vintage and retro items being sold at this colorful shop.



## LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

### Dewey Cannon Trading

#### Company & Bicycle Museum

##### 3 Dewey Cannon Avenue, Three Oaks

This unique gem features bicycles dating back to the 1800s through the 20th century. You'll see a Greg LeMond bicycle used to win the 1989 Tour de France final time-trial by a mere eight seconds. They rent bikes, too, and provide 20 different mapped bicycle routes throughout the county.



Dewey Cannon Trading Company & Bicycle Museum is fun for the entire family or tour group. Be sure to check out their gift shop — they offer a great selection of Michigan items, t-shirts, hats and many unique and hard-to-find treasures.

### Journeyman Distillery

#### 109 Generation Drive, Three Oaks

An old buggy whip and corset factory might seem like an unusual place for a distillery, but that is exactly where the Journeyman Distillery is located.

The factory still stands today and houses the Journeyman Distillery and the Acorn Theater. The distillery is an organic spirits distillery and offers tours to the public. A restaurant is onsite as well.



### Acorn Theater

#### 107 Generation Drive, Three Oaks

The Acorn Theater is a rare and remarkable performing arts venue bringing high-quality, professional, live entertainment.

Housed in a turn-of-the-century former corset stay factory, this beautiful building is now a venue for many performers.

The Acorn produces over 100 shows a year in its 260-seat house.

Audiences can be assured of a great time of entertainment. John Hancock, producer of *Prancer*, debuts many of his shows at this theater.



### Froehlich's Bakery & Deli

#### 26 North Elm Street, Three Oaks

You can enjoy a variety of breads, pies, pastries, unique desserts, soups, salads, and deli sandwiches at Froehlich's Bakery & Deli. They also offer an assortment of house-made jams, jellies, pickles, and specialty foods.



### Silver Beach Carousel

#### 333 Broad Street, St. Joseph

A classic restored merry-go-round with painted animals and music from a vintage band organ. Kids and adults alike will love this place.

The Silver Beach Carousel, with its brass ring machine and 44 hand-carved, life-like horses, began thrilling crowds of visitors in 1910.



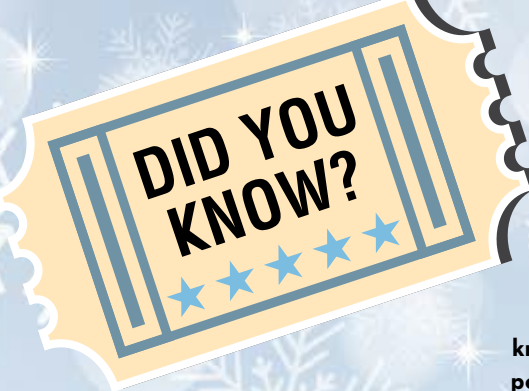
Make sure you check out all 48 unique carousel figures and two chariots. Pick your favorite and come ride beneath 1,000 twinkling lights.

### St. Joseph North Pier Lighthouse

#### St. Joseph

St. Joseph North Pier inner and outer lights are two iconic, historic lighthouses at the entrance to the St. Joseph River on Lake Michigan. These lighthouses were the first ones built on Lake Michigan and are connected by an elevated catwalk and offer dramatic sunset views. Visitors can take guided tours of the inner lighthouse and even climb up to the very top of the lantern room for a bird's-eye view. Whether you choose a guided walking tour or decide to explore the lighthouse on your own, you'll learn all about these two lights' 180-year history.





## DID YOU KNOW?

**Six different reindeer were used for the film. One mechanical deer. The real name of the main reindeer who played Prancer was “Boo.”**

The producer of the movie *Prancer*, John Hancock, also produced the hit movies *Bang The Drum Slowly* and *Let's Scare Jessica To Death*.

**Greg Taylor wrote the screenplay for *Prancer* and is co-producer. He wrote the screenplay three years before it became a movie, after his daughter, Jessica, asked him to tell her a Christmas story, and he started the tale of a reindeer named Prancer.**

**Later, when he was casting about for a new story idea, he remembered how much Jessie had liked the Prancer tale, and started working it into a screenplay. “It seemed so natural,” he said. “I wanted to capture the innocence of childhood. We need that.”**

An eye-opener: For Dorothy Shook, a member of the Three Oaks United Methodist Church, the movie carried several messages. “It showed we are a supportive community and we’ve got to be ready for change.” Shook said. It also raised a question. “At one point, when actress Cloris Leachman, the unpleasant old woman, comes down the aisle, we were told to turn and look at her as if to wonder

‘why are you here?’ I wonder how many times we do that when someone new or different comes to our church. Do we really want the ‘oddballs’ here? I had to stop and think about that one for a minute,” Shook said.

**Having the church chosen as one of the movie sites has helped let people know the church exists. More than 1,000 people came through the building during the filming compared to its membership of 160. “There were people who have lived in this town all their lives who had never been in this church before,” said a local resident. “If you’re going to be a force in the community, you have to be visible. For once, we were visible. Now when people ask which church I go to, I say, ‘the one where *Prancer* was shot.’”**

The production company gave the church all the Christmas decorations after filming was complete as a thank you for their help and kindness.

**During the Christmas holiday, visitors can have their picture taken with a decoration of Santa and his reindeer, except Prancer. The three-dimensional display, which hung over the town’s main street in the movie, now sits on the post office lawn just across from the church. There’s a hole in the reindeer line-up for Prancer who, as movie goers will learn, fell from the sky in an opening scene.**

Local resident, Marcia Hausmann Dinges stated, “While *Prancer* was being filmed, I was a teller at the Bank of Three Oaks where the library is today. One day, Police Chief Frank Nekvasil walked in and as he came up the steps said, ‘Ladies, I have a present for you.’ When he got to the top of the steps he stepped aside and there was Sam Elliott,” the popular and handsome Hollywood star who played the role of Jessica Riggs’ father in the movie.

**A silent night? There’s one Christmas carol that the choir isn’t likely to sing this year. Member Doris Krossovitch, explained, “We sang ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing’ hundreds of times during the filming of *Prancer* at our church. The producers just kept telling us to sing so we sang our hearts out.” Ironically, only the choir’s faces and not their voices made it into the movie. “After all that, you never hear us,” Krossovitch said. She was, however, thrilled to see herself and fellow choir members on screen.**

The film crew had to reschedule exterior shooting from early February to later in the month, in hopes of being blessed with a snowfall. “But they had a special effects man, just in case. You’d be amazed by how many films that’s used in.” The special effects crew worked hard in Three Oaks as hoped-for snow failed to fall. Hence, soap suds and instant potato flakes were used as a substitute for real snow.

**Church members learned a lot about making movies. Lloyd Gearhart found himself walking not through snow for eight hours but through soap suds with instant potato flakes being blown by a fan into his face. “I’ve heard of miracles, but they actually turned day into night and night into day, all with lights. At midnight, they had the sun shining through our stained-glass window.”**

The pastor of the church, Pastor Pearson, said that having Hollywood come to the church for a day was work, but fun. He read the script to decide if the church would be appropriately used. During planning and filming, members said he served as an anchor. Pearson said the job seemed natural. “You’d get about five people asking the same question and nobody knowing what the others were

doing. It was just like the church,” he said. While he was too young and had too much hair to play the pastor in the movie, his robe did make the cut. “Right after they called about using the church, they called to ask if I had a black robe they could use,” Pearson said. “It had to be black. They wanted me to send it to them for several months, but I said I couldn’t do that. When they got here, they still didn’t have one.” When they saw Pearson’s robes, it wasn’t the black one, but a gray one with red trim they decided to use.

**Three Oaks United Methodist Church members agree that being in the movies is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, yet they wanted to hold onto the magic and excitement of *Prancer* just a bit longer. They invited all the residents in town who participated in the filming to a holiday celebration at the church.**

Local Three Oaks resident, Chrissy Shannon remembers playing darts with Sam Elliott and his wife, Katherine Ross, at McGuire’s after his bodyguard overheard her describe Elliott as being “too grubby to be a movie star.”

**The entire community of Three Oaks raved about Sam Elliott. He was always willing to sign autographs, whether you passed him on the street or saw him at a local watering hole, Sam Elliott extended his hand out to the community. Elliot was even seen signing an autograph for a fan on the trunk of her car as well as the back of jackets of children. How cool is that?**

The movie *Prancer* was screened in 20 different cities across the U.S. to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a non-profit organization that fulfills wish experiences for children with life threatening illnesses.



The Michigan Film and Digital Media Office (MFDMO) was created in 1979 to assist and attract incoming production companies and to promote the growth of Michigan's indigenous industry. Since its inception, the MFDMO commissioner has been responsible for implementing a program that lives within the parameters of Michigan law and works to ensure the program runs efficiently and effectively. Today, the MFDMO is working diligently to guarantee the film and digital media program accomplishes key results of private investment and workforce development by encouraging high wages, high-tech jobs and talent retention.

*Prancer tour is the sole property of the Michigan Film & Digital Media Office.  
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