

# Seeing dollar signs

The Price of Paradise shows the high cost of the local housing market

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by Stacey Wiebe

It wasn't long ago that Lisa Snider — film director, writer, producer and all-around “make-it-happen lady” — knew next to nothing about making movies.

All that changed when she was assigned to make a film by her boss, Ed Moses, the former director of the Santa Barbara Department of Housing and Community Development and current executive director of the Ventura Housing Authority.

“I was really Ed Moses' right hand,” said Snider, who worked with Moses in Santa Barbara and made the move with him to Ventura as his assistant. “If he needed a letter typed, I did it. If he needed a movie made, I did it.”

Moses assigned her the task of making an educational video about the challenges of living in the astronomically high-priced greater Santa Barbara housing market. Snider, an Ojai resident, took the request in stride, producing a film called *The Price of Paradise*.

In making the film, Snider knew to ask for help from acquaintance and filmmaker Michael Anderson, owner of both Extra Mile Films and Ventura's Well Polished shoe store. But neither knew that their little “educational video” would take the prize for Best Documentary Feature at the Oxnard Independent Film Festival. Nor did

they anticipate that it would ultimately land in the lineup at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. “The documentary being shown on a local network was the best that we hoped for,” Snider said, with a glance at Anderson, when the two met last week in a Ventura coffee shop to discuss the film.

“There were a lot of films in the Oxnard film festival,” Anderson said. “It was really rewarding to know that, of all those, we did it.”

After teaming up with Anderson and his business partner, 20-year-old film student Austen Collins, Snider began scheduling and conducting about 20 interviews with those she said represent the “critical workforce,” people like police, firefighters, teachers and others. They talked to those people who are struggling to deal with the high cost of living in Santa Barbara, a place where, along the coast, the median price for a house is \$1.2 million.

Snider also interviewed several Ventura County residents who commute to work in Santa Barbara but cannot afford to live there. The challenges this segment of the population face are several and varied, and include everything from parents spending “quality” family time with their children during lengthy work commutes to the tasks of deciding which cities should serve as the school base for those children, while striving to make ends meet. According to Snider, an estimated 100,000 people will be commuting from Ventura County to Santa Barbara within the next 25 years.

“There is one part of an interview where a man says, ‘It would be nice if my wife's parents could enjoy their grandchildren here in Santa Barbara and we don't know how we can do that,’” Snider said. “This is a couple who doesn't have children or a home and don't know how to make that happen.”

While Snider knew the ins and outs of housing issues, Anderson and Collins knew how to meet the challenge of

“It was interesting because I knew nothing about filmmaking and Michael and Austen knew nothing about housing. In the beginning, we just sort of bumbled our way through it,” Snider said. “All in all, it was a nine-month project, and I say it was like birthing a baby.”

The trio bonded as they delved into the subject matter, gleaned new information, tailored the filmmaking process to fit their needs and shared their respective knowledge.

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Lisa Snider, director of the *Price of Paradise*.

“Our chemistry was really amazing,” Anderson added. “If we had ideas, we listened to each other and were able to bring it all together.”

The long hours and effective communication enabled the three to utilize their unique chemistry to create a documentary of with Snider “national relevance,” according to Snider. “I think it could resonate nationwide because making a potentially dry subject visually arresting. Shot in a high-quality digital format, the filmmakers use of voiceovers, music and local scenic imagery — among other artistic devices — to breathe life into the film.

“We did a lot of day trips to certain areas in the county to make the cinematography very tip-top,” Anderson said. “We used aerial shots and great music, and great music is so key.”

In addition to the 42-minute documentary, the trio produced a 22-minute cut for those “educational” purposes, and those of the short-attention-span variety. Over the course of about nine months of interviewing, shooting, visually capturing the heart of the story and plenty of editing, the three produced a product they're proud of.

it's all relative,” Snider said.

The documentary, however enlightening, does not offer solutions to the current difficulties in the housing trend. In true documentary style, the filmmakers presented the reality reflected by their research and are leaving the solutions in the hands of the viewers. “It does grab your heart because you look at these people and it's not easy,” Anderson said. “Like everyone, they want security. They just want to control their destiny.”

Lisa Snider is a contributor to the Ventura County Reporter. The Price of Paradise will be screened at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival at 7 p.m. on Jan. 26 at the Marjorie Luke Theater; and at 10 a.m. at Victoria Hall. At each screening, Paradise will be the second

film shown (which means the film will show roughly an hour after the 7 p.m. and 11 a.m. start times for the three-film blocks). A question-and-answer period with the filmmakers will follow the Jan. 26 screening. For more information, visit [www.findingojai.com/ThePriceofParadise.html](http://www.findingojai.com/ThePriceofParadise.html) or sbiff.org.