

NORTHWEST HERALD

On the Record With: Prairie Ridge High School Senior Will Restrepo

CRYSTAL LAKE – When Will Restrepo was about 3 years old, he would tell people he wanted to be a humanitarian.

His mother, Robin Restrepo, didn't even know where he could have picked up that word.

"I probably had a vague idea," he said.

The Prairie Ridge High School senior is taking his first forays into activism, appearing in the Christian movie "UnMiracle" about teenagers and drug abuse and earning a spot on the 14-member Youth Leadership Team for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

Restrepo recently returned from Washington, D.C., where he learned about his new role. He sat down with reporter Emily K. Coleman to talk about the campaign and his other work.

Coleman: You weren't sure if you were going to apply for this post at first. Why was that?

Restrepo: Because it's concerning teen pregnancy, and that's not something I've really had experience with. I've never really found it to be a huge problem, because I don't see a ton of it. But I thought that definitely in other places, and it would be good to be a spokesperson for it because I do think it's probably an issue [in] other places.

Coleman: What ultimately made you decide to go for it?

Restrepo: It would be a lot of new people and a lot of good connections.

Coleman: This isn't your first foray into activist-type work. The movie you acted in is about teens and drug abuse. How did that come about?

Restrepo: My mom got an email from somebody at my school who was involved in the theater program and was actually interning for the studio. He was like, "Hey, they're having auditions for background characters, for extras." So I went in with a prepared monologue, and I auditioned. I thought it would be a great experience to do something for people who are more into film than theater because I've only ever done theater. I auditioned, and when they called me back they said they wanted me to be a lead. Of course, I was surprised.

Coleman: Tell me about the character that you played.

Restrepo: I played Arin, and he is a straight-edge [someone who abstains from alcohol and drugs]. He is kind of involved with the drug culture but not that he's involved, but the people he hangs around. He tries to help them in anyway he can. He's very kind.

Coleman: Besides theater, what else do you do? Or does that take most of your time?

Restrepo: That takes a lot of my time. I'm in the a cappella choir there that actually just went to all state this past year, which was really exciting. I've been singing since I was born. My mom's a music teacher, so I've always been involved in that – musicals, plays, theaters. I joined the astronomy club at school.

Coleman: That's very different than the rest of the list.

Restrepo: It is very different. Just because of the people, I thought I would be really interested. I'm also very involved in my church.

Coleman: Where do you go?

Restrepo: First Congregational Church. I've been involved with the cantatas there, which are like religious plays. My mom's a teacher there, so I've been involved in the child choir, and then the middle school, then the high school choir. I'm actually the president of the high school choir. I also do the bell choir. I do hand bell playing. Then, of course, we do stuff with the food pantry and selling greens.

Coleman: You're entering your senior year, so you're probably thinking about what you want to do long-term. Do you think you're going to continue with this type of outreach work?

Restrepo: Right now, I'm really thinking – unless acting goes somewhere – probably religious studies, social work or psychology. I'm thinking a pastoral counselor, because I just love helping people. For a really long time, I've wanted to be a counselor, but it's only more recently that I decided that I'd like to be also involved with a church.

Coleman: Why is that?

Restrepo: I've always had a lot of questions about religion. I've always been very skeptical, not skeptical as in hard on religion, but I had a lot of questions. I'm very open-minded. Being involved in my church, it's [United Church of Christ], and so they really allow you to ask questions. They're very open. Because of that and because of the church community that I've had – it's very close knit and everybody's very helpful – that's why I decided I'd like to be a part of a church.

The Restrepo lowdown

Hometown: Crystal Lake

Family: Will Restrepo, 17, is the son of Robin and Gil Restrepo. He has one sister, Ellie, 13.

Favorite play or musical: "West Side Story"

Top of your bucket list: Travel to underdeveloped countries and help people.