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**Play where Ralphie and Randy lived in 'A Christmas Story'
At 'A Christmas Story' House & Museum in Cleveland, visitors are encouraged
to reenact favorite scenes from the movie.
And this season, Ian Petrella (Randy) will be on hand.**

By Jay Jones, Special to the Los Angeles Times | December 19, 2010

Reporting from Cleveland — The occasional car crawls down 11th Street, its driver and passengers looking for a parking space not too far from their destination, a nondescript residence that is becoming a popular tourist destination in a working-class Cleveland neighborhood.

Visitors often recognize the mustard-yellow house, with its equally unattractive army-green trim, well before they spot the sign welcoming them to "A Christmas Story" House. This was home to the Parker family in the 1983 movie about 9-year-old Ralphie's wish for a Red Ryder air rifle, despite cautions from adults — including a department store Santa — that "you'll shoot your eye out."

The film was a box-office flop. "Nobody went to go see it," lamented Ian Petrella of Pasadena, who, as a child actor, played Randy Parker, younger brother of Ralphie, played by Peter Billingsley. "It got a ton of wonderful reviews, but nobody, I guess, was really interested in seeing it at the time. Movies like 'Scarface' [and 'Terms of Endearment'] were coming out, so those were its competition."

Thanks to frequent holiday-season screenings on cable TV, "A Christmas Story" has developed such a reverential following that one of its fanatic fans decided to buy the Parker house and open it to the public.

"I took all of about 10 seconds to decide to buy it," recalled Brian Jones, who learned the house was for sale on EBay in 2004. He paid \$150,000 for the property, then pumped \$250,000 into its restoration.

"Most of that 10 seconds was [spent] going to MapQuest to figure out where Cleveland and, for that fact, Ohio were located," said the California native. "It seemed like an obvious opportunity of a lifetime."

Jones also bought the house across the street to use as a movie memorabilia museum. Both opened in November 2006. A gift shop, in a third home, was added about a year later.

"When families come, it's not just the parents and kids. The grandparents often come too," said Steve Siedlecki, the museum's executive director. "There's something in the movie that everyone can relate to."

That's definitely the case for Greg Dudichum, who first saw the movie on Christmas Day 1983 and stopped by the house during a business trip to Cleveland. He laughed as he remembered the constricting snowsuit that Randy's mom forced him to wear.

"That snowsuit — that was how my mother dressed us," he said of growing up in New Jersey. "You could hardly move."

Randy's fire-engine-red snowsuit is among the many props on display in the museum. Many were donated by Petrella.

"It was a big part of my childhood experience," he said of the influence the movie had on his life.

Petrella will greet guests at the Cleveland house through the first week in January. While in town, he's living in an apartment upstairs from the living room that contains a 1940s-era Christmas tree and the movie's memorable leg lamp. It shines brightly in the front window.

The museum's director said visitors are welcome — and even encouraged — to act out their favorite scenes. That includes climbing into the cupboard under the kitchen sink, as young Randy did in the movie.

"We've replaced those hinges a couple of times," Siedlecki said.

Petrella, who as a youngster easily squeezed into the cupboard, looked on as visitors reenacted his role.

"Usually, I'm answering questions about the film and my experiences," he said. "People have shown great interest. They're fascinated by the idea that there's somebody from the movie that's here and that they get to hang out with that person."

Petrella now works behind the scenes in movie production. He hopes to carve out some time next summer to once again take up residence at "A Christmas Story" House to help share the movie's wonders with its growing number of fans.

"The impact that it's making now [on cable], you just kind of realize what you're a part of," he said. "And you realize you're a part of something pretty big and pretty exciting."

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