

**For Immediate Release**

## ***Waiting For Ronald***

### The Debut of a Film and a Man's Independence

A simple bus ride becomes a monumental journey in the life of two very special friends in the critically acclaimed Lulu Productions' film, *Waiting for Ronald*. After spending most of his years in an institution, Ronald says good-bye to his friends and caretaker to join his buddy Edgar in the exciting world of independence. Armed with bus fare, a lifetime packed into one small suitcase, and a heart full of courage, Ronald boards the bus that will take him to Edgar and a new life. But Edgar, fighting demons of his own, runs into a problem before the bus carrying his new roommate arrives. What happens next is a testament to faith, humor, bravery and friendship.

*Waiting for Ronald* is a two-year labor of love for writer, producer and director, Ellen Gerstein. Although an accomplished actress for over 20 years, starring in film and television roles such as James Dean's agent in the TNT movie, *James Dean*; "Sofie" the homeless woman in *Annie* with Kathy Bates; and "Aunt Lisa" on NBC's *Friends*, as well as numerous theater roles, Gerstein chose to stay behind the camera on *Waiting for Ronald*. "I wanted to concentrate all my efforts into making the best film I possibly could without being distracted as an actor," she explains. "As it was, it took me almost three years to transform a thought in my head to a story on the screen."

First, Gerstein used her graduate degree in psychology and six years as a social worker to form the story and characters in the film. Already an award-winning writer for her one-woman show, *My Psychotherapy Comeback Tour* and other works, including an interactive play entitled *Club Disco*, writing the story "was the easy part," relates Gerstein. She then had to overcome the challenge of casting the film, knowing the vital importance of avoiding stereotypes and keeping the characters, disabled and not disabled, true and real. Well-known and respected actor and director, Bruno Kirby, was so touched by the script that he volunteered his enormous talents and time to the project, playing Ronald's counselor, "Joe."

"After four months of casting and three months of rehearsals, we are so very proud to have successfully blended developmentally-challenged and non-challenged actors in our special, and very personal, little film," explains first-time film director Gerstein. "We accomplished what some thought was impossible and learned from each other every step of the way." Jody Clark, the disabled actor who plays Ronald explains further, "My being disabled, I wanted a movie to show what it is like from our point of view. It is heartfelt and I can relate to Ronald, and I shall always have a fond place in my heart for the movie."

Hailed by those in both the entertainment and healthcare industries for its "honesty" and "integrity," *Waiting for Ronald* touches the hearts of all who see it. "What a charming, heartfelt film with a wonderful sense of humanity and humor," concludes Mimi Leder, director of many major studio films, including the most recent *Pay It Forward*. Gail Williamson, a member of the Governor's Committee for Employment of Disabled Persons for the State of California, adds, "Waiting for Ronald addresses the self-determination of people with developmental disabilities and celebrates their lives." Williamson continues, "It also tells a story of flawless inclusion...making it difficult for the viewer to tell which ones are truly disabled and which are just acting the part. The one obvious observation is that all are gifted and talented actors."

## **WAITING FOR RONALD/ADD ONE**

All the talented people who brought *Waiting for Ronald* to life are anxious to share the film with those who might be encouraged by its message and moved by its humanity. In preview screenings, followed by a question and answer session with the filmmakers and cast, the response to the film has been overwhelming. Viewers agree that its potential to change lives and attitudes is limitless. Aaron Markovits, Service Coordinator for People First of Kern County, states that *Waiting for Ronald* “could have a profound impact on reducing barriers to housing, employment and civil rights for people with developmental disabilities in our country. If even one person has a change of heart by viewing this film, it makes the entire project a worthwhile investment.” Future screenings for charity events, educational organizations and schools, government facilities, film festivals and acting classes are in the planning stages. A full-length feature is also being discussed.

*Waiting for Ronald* was worth the wait.