



Naperville teen Ava Morse provides the voice for “Miriam” (the character wearing a green cap) in the just-released Disney/Pixar animated film “Turning Red,” which can be seen on Disney+.

Naperville teen voice of character in ‘Turning Red’

By Rafael Guerrero
Naperville Sun

When the trailer was released for Disney/Pixar’s newest animated film, “Turning Red,” Naperville teen Ava Morse was front and center.

“My beat boxing was the first thing people heard in the trailer,” said Ava, 16, a Naperville School District 203 high school student. “The second I could tell people I did.”

“Turning Red,” which premiered last week on Disney+, tells the story of 13-year-old Meilin “Mei” Lee, a Chinese-Canadian girl in Toronto who’s juggling the throes of becoming a teenager while trying to meet the expectations of her parents.

“And as if changes to her interests, relationships and body weren’t enough,” the Disney/Pixar movie description says, “whenever she gets too excited (which is practically ALWAYS), she ‘poofs’ into a giant red panda.”

Ava plays Miriam one of Mei’s best friends.

“The best friend anybody could ask for,” Ava said. “She’s a tomboy at heart. It was really fun to play her.”

It is the aspiring actor/singer’s biggest role yet and one she says is especially meaningful to her given the movie’s themes.

“I’m so honored,” Ava said. (“Turning Red”) is so groundbreaking from anything else (Pixar) has done.”

She auditioned for the film via Zoom at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for the same reason ended up recording the role at home and in a studio in Chicago between summer 2020 and summer 2021, she said.

“I was recording the movie in a closet, which was a really interesting experience,”



Morse, who’s 16 and a Naperville School District 203 high school student, waves to photographers March 1 at the world premiere of “Turing Red” in Los Angeles. **CHRIS PIZZELLO/AP**

Ava said. “Eventually when COVID started chilling out, I went out more to this studio in Chicago and did it there.”

Setting up the home studio was “pretty straightforward,” said Debra Morse, Ava’s mother.

“Pixar sent us some equipment, and we could just plug in,” she said.

If that was the easy part, the recording was harder, Ava said.

“It takes a super-long time to do, it takes so many people to do,” she said. “Voiceover is like you have to go for it. It can be embarrassing at times. Especially for this movie, you had to constantly go crazy, laugh, sing

and have fun.”

Because of COVID-19, Ava didn’t get to meet her fellow cast mates or the filmmakers in person until the red carpet premiere and press appearances earlier this month.

Director and co-writer Domee Shi is the first woman to have a directorial credit for a Pixar feature film, a historic aspect of the project for which Ava said she was particularly proud.

The “Turning Red” story also addresses themes she believes will resonate with girls, women and families.

“The movie itself opens up everyone’s eyes to culture and gender and relationships. It shows puberty in a way nobody has seen before,” Ava said. “It shows very strong healthy friendships with Miriam and her friends. ... It’s such a beautiful thing to say I’m a part of.”

Her mother added: “It’s such an honor to be a part of that project that she was graced with this opportunity. It’s really incredible.”

Ava started acting and singing at age 5. She did musical theater until she was about 10, and then decided to make a shift to on-camera work.

She’s done one other voice role in the 2021 animated movie “Ron’s Gone Wrong,” and has appeared on screen in HBO’s “Somebody Somewhere,” NBC’s “Chicago P.D.,” and the TV movie “The History of Us.” Her television commercials include ads for Cosentyx, Cinnamon Frosted Flakes and Hebrew National.

“It doesn’t just happen overnight,” Ava said. “I’ve been working my whole life for this. I’ve stayed centered, I’ve stayed focused. And I’m only 16, yet I’ve come so far to get to this moment.”

raguerrero@tribpub.com

Loaves & Fishes launches pickup app

By David Sharos
Naperville Sun

A new Loaves & Fishes app allows clients to place food orders electronically and select a pickup time that works with their schedule.

Known as the Loaves & Fishes Online Market, items can be preselected and the order filled for pickup at the Naperville nonprofit’s distribution center at 580 Exchange Court in Aurora.

The system is not unlike what grocery stores offer as a convenience for customers who don’t have the time or means to do traditional shopping, Loaves & Fishes President/CEO Mike Havala said.

“We wanted to have something for people too busy working or maybe having three kids at home and couldn’t find the time to get to the food pantry,” Havala said.

“We started looking at getting this app two to three years ago. We started talking to some of our clients about this and found that about a third of them said this was something they would actively use,” he said

The software was developed about a year ago and launched at the beginning of this month. With the addition of the new distribution center, which not only allowed Loaves & Fishes to increase its inventory but expand its reach into Kane and Kendall counties, such a system became feasible.

“We rolled things out about two weeks ago and have already filled orders for 100 families,” Havala said. “With an average of four per family, that’s food for about 400 people.”

Volunteers at the distribution center are available to fill the grocery orders and get them out to clients.

“We still have people come in and shop as usual at the Naperville site while the online orders are filled exclusively in Aurora,” he said. “Like at Amazon Fresh and other sites, you do need people to go through the areas and fill orders and we’ve been really fortunate to have volunteers who have stepped up to do that.”

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Black Film Summit comes to Naperville’s NIU campus

By Kathy Cichon
For Naperville Sun

Greg Turner has always been a movie fan.

“Back in the day when I was a kid, me and my buddy used to go to the old dollar theater out at Fox Valley Mall over there,” he said.

When he stationed in Japan while serving in the U.S. Marines, he got 27-inch TV and home theater. Now, the Yorkville resident has a 150-inch screen in his living room and a surround sound system.

It only seems logical that the next step would be founding a film festival.

“I just kind of decided, ‘you know what, I think it’s time to do a film festival,’ ” he said. “I really wanted to share this world of film with people that aren’t the movies made by your MGMs and Disney and that kind of thing.”

The first ever Black Film Summit will be held March 18-19 at Northern Illinois University’s Naperville campus. The film festival runs from 6 to 10 p.m. March 18 and from 12 to 8 p.m. March 19.

Tickets are \$25 each day for just the movies, \$45 two-day pass for the just the movies, \$55 for the Opening Night reception with drinks and hors d’oeuvres and March 18 films and \$85 for an all inclusive weekend pass, which includes all films, the Opening Night reception and a midday break with beverages and snacks on March 19.

Tickets that include food/beverages are available in advance only.

The idea for the festival was sparked, in part, by the release of the blockbuster “Black Panther,” said Turner, who grew up in Aurora.

“When ‘Black Panther’ came out, churches would rent out whole theaters and everybody was going to see the movie, I was kind of just like, ‘well, there’s this

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Next Christkindlmarket will be staged in Aurora

Staff report

The popular Christkindlmarket is returning to the western suburbs and will be in downtown Aurora next holiday season.

German American Events LLC announced this week that the Christkindlmarket, which also has a downtown Chicago event during the holidays, will also return to the suburbs. It last was seen in the western suburbs in Naperville in 2019.

Aurora Mayor Richard Irvin also announced the plans for the market during his State of the City address this week. Exact times and dates have not been released, but the market will be at RiverEdge Park along the Fox River in downtown Aurora.

“We are so happy to bring the Christkindlmarket back to the western suburbs, especially at a site as beautiful as RiverEdge Park,” said Kate Bleeker, expansion and market development director for German American Events. “For the last few years, many people have asked when we would have a suburban market, and we are overjoyed to have found such wonderful partners as the city of Aurora and (Aurora Civic Center Authority) to make this dream a reality.”

During his speech, Irvin announced that the city will close out the year “by bringing a new energy to downtown Aurora with a new partnership coming this winter to RiverEdge Park.”

“A new event that will bring thousands to Aurora, well known for its vendors, its high-quality gifts, its food, holiday cheer,



The Christkindlmarket, last held in Naperville, will be held next holiday season at RiverEdge Park in Aurora. **CHRISTKINDLMARKET**

and as an ideal place for families to make memories,” Irvin said.

“RiverEdge Park is the ideal site to host the return of the Christkindlmarket to the western suburbs,” said Tim Rater, president and CEO of the Aurora Civic Center Authority which operates RiverEdge Park. “We’ve always wanted to find a way to activate the park beyond the summer concert season, and we can’t wait to welcome area residents and Christkindlmarket fans from

all over to this incredible new holiday destination in downtown Aurora.”

He pointed out that during Christkindlmarket’s first year in Aurora, the Paramount Theatre will be staging a production of “The Sound of Music” just a short walk away from RiverEdge.

“The City of Lights will truly be lit up with the sights and sounds of the holiday

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