

WHO'LL BE THE NEXT KATIE HOLMES?

5 Toledo-area actors under age 30 are among new generation of hopefuls in Hollywood

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Adrienne Palicki's acting career is the kind of thing you see, well, in the movies.

The local woman didn't take the stage in her first play until she was a sophomore at Whitmer High School (where she was runner-up for homecoming queen).

She got hooked, skipped college, went to New York for a modeling and talent competition, then L.A., and "pretty much went broke."

But she persisted - as those spunky Midwestern girls in the movies always do - and landed some roles, most notably that of sassy Brianna on UPN's *South Beach*.

Most notably ... until now.

On Tuesday, at age 23, Palicki will be beamed into the homes of millions with a regular role as the town vixen on the new, high-profile NBC series, *Friday Night Lights*.

She's part of a new generation of young wannabe stars from the area hoping to follow the path blazed by Toledo's Katie Holmes.

They're not household names - yet - but these actors under age 30, a few of whom are profiled here, are giving it their best shot.

"I was like, if Katie Holmes can do it, I can do it," said Palicki, whose parents, Jeff and Nancy Palicki, live in West Toledo. "If somebody from my hometown can do it, then that means it's possible."

Getting on the NBC drama about a small-town high school football team with high expectations is only the latest way she's found to get her adrenaline fix, something she's been seeking since she first performed before an audience.

"I knew almost the minute I walked out on stage that that was what I wanted to do," Palicki said during a phone interview from Austin, where the NBC show is being produced.

"It's the most amazing adrenaline rush I've ever had in my life," she continued. "I feel that way every time I step in front of a camera. It's an immediate high."

Much of her success - she's also had gigs on *North Shore*, *CSI*, *Smallville*, *Supernatural* and a couple of pilots that didn't get picked up - she credits to luck but also a plucky determination.

No matter how many auditions it took, she said she never thought about giving up.

"I went out with the mentality of: I'm gonna be out here 'til I'm 50 working as a waitress if I have to," she said.

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Jonathan Bennett is a lucky man, and not just because Lindsay Lohan had a crush on him.

"My career has done exactly what I wanted it to," said Bennett, 25, who is from Rossford. "It made me be able to live in Hollywood, act for a living and not have to have other jobs, and be able to live comfortably. And that's all I can ask for."

A big help was his role in *Mean Girls*, the 2004 teen movie smash in which he played the cute boy that Lohan

liked.

The success of that movie changed his life. It meant he didn't have to try out for every part anymore, that sometimes people would just call and offer him parts.

"You just get more respect in the industry," he said.

Not bad for a guy who fell in love with acting at Rossford High School and dropped out of Otterbein College after about a year to pursue his dream.

Bennett started his professional career in New York City, where an agent approached him on the subway and later signed him. He started on the soap opera All My Children and had a stint on Law & Order: Special Victims Unit.

It was in California, though, that his career took off. Other than Mean Girls, he's been on TV series like Veronica Mars and movies like Cheaper by the Dozen 2, where he got to meet Steve Martin.

"Getting to work with my acting idol was pretty much the coolest thing in the world," he said.

Next year, Bennett will appear as Bo Duke in a straight-to-DVD movie The Dukes of Hazzard II. Then he'll try a horror movie.

Despite working with a lot of big names, Bennett said he's starting to come into his own, something he thought about when he told his mom, Ruthanne Bennett, of Perrysburg, about his upcoming project.

"Her question was, who's in it?" he said. "It took me a second to realize and think and my response was, 'Well, I am.' That was a really cool moment."

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In some ways, Alyson Stoner just wants to be a regular teenager.

The 13-year-old former Toledoan likes to go out and set up a lemonade stand. She goes to a public school in L.A. and plays for an area basketball team.

The difference is she's kinda famous.

Not many eighth-graders have been in movies with Steve Martin (Cheaper by the Dozen and its sequel) or music videos with Eminem ("Just Lose It").

Her fellow students have noticed, and sometimes the result is unexpected.

"There's a rumor that I have a glass eye," she said. "You don't really expect that."

Stoner's acting career actually began on the dance floor. She's studied dance since age 3, and later was discovered at a modeling and talent convention in New York. She was represented there by the same local modeling and talent agency that worked with Holmes and Palicki.

The former Maumee Valley Country Day School student made it big by showing off her hip-hop moves in the Missy Elliot videos for "Work It" and "Gossip Folks."

After she'd relocated to L.A. at age 7, she decided, "Why not do it all?" and turned to acting.

Now Stoner can claim roles in the recent dance movie Step Up, The Suite Life of Zack and Cody, and a regular gig on the Disney Channel's Mike's Super Short Show, where she helps promote Disney's upcoming features.

Stoner - the daughter of Charlie Stoner, who still lives in the area, and LuAnne and John Hodges, who are with her in California - remains irrepressibly bouncy, though she admits balancing auditions with schoolwork, filming, teaching hip-hop, and living her life can be a bit much.

"There's definitely times when I'm very overwhelmed and I just want to lay down and sleep for three days," she said.

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Jimmy Schueler used to kid around with his best friend that they'd quit their jobs one day and head to Hollywood.

Instead, he ended up with a marketing degree from Bowling Green State University, supervising some Aldi grocery stores in the Detroit area.

Even when he got adventurous, it was to move to Florida and work on a billionaire's private yacht, not to face the bright lights of L.A.

But somehow, the dream still came true.

Schueler, 28, bumped into an agent one day and struck up a conversation. Before long, the Northview High School graduate found his way into the movie *2 Fast 2 Furious* - first as an extra, but later as a stunt double for star Paul Walker.

"That was really my introduction to the world of making movies," said Schueler, whose parents, Jim and Katie Schueler, live in Sylvania. "It's a tough business, especially for someone like me who didn't know anything right away."

He followed that up with some modeling, including a stint for *Marie Claire* where he played a human Ken doll, and enrolled in acting classes before eventually moving to L.A., the mecca of movie-making.

Work is sporadic, but minor parts have been coming.

He was part of a Swedish family in a daydream sequence on *Desperate Housewives* and appeared on the daytime soap *Passions*. This summer, he was a waiter trying to pry information out of contestants on the Sci Fi Channel's *Who Wants to be a Superhero?*

Schueler said he doesn't think about his acting career fizzling. The way he sees it, his degree is doing more than taking up space on the wall or helping him with promotional marketing for events that he does on the side.

"Now I find myself marketing myself instead of anything else," he said.

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The story of Tracey McCall is the story of the hit TV series that almost was.

Like *Twins*, a show about fraternal twins Sara Gilbert and Molly Stanton -and their mom, Melanie Griffith - where McCall had a recurring role.

Or *Dr. Vegas*, starring Rob Lowe, where she played a character's personal manicurist.

Or even a new *MacGyver* (this time following the adventures of the nephew of the Richard Dean

Anderson character), where she appeared in the pilot.

The problem is, those series got canceled and the pilot wasn't picked up.

"That's the frustrating part," said McCall. "[You think,] this is a great role. This is substantial. We have a movie star attached ... Nothing's guaranteed in this business."

A native of Lasalle, Mich., and a graduate of Monroe High School, McCall, 29, certainly has the right pedigree.

Her father, Tom Roemer (Tracey dropped her last name when she went into show biz), sang and danced as a child, with appearances on several well-known television programs.

Growing up, she studied ballet, took modeling classes, and participated in plays and musicals. In 1995, she won a \$10,000 contest to be the spokesmodel for *No Excuses Jeans* for a year.

She took acting classes in college at Michigan State University before moving to Denver for even more training. When she hit L.A. five years ago, she started with commercials, then got into TV and films (waiting tables on the side, of course).

It's tough work auditioning all the time, hoping to get a juicy role, then hoping that role actually gets seen by audiences.

Her first break was a small part in the flick *Not Another Teen Movie*, and she's gone on to TV's *Gilmore Girls* and *What I Like About You*. She also has two films in post-production, *Look* and *You Are Here*.

Nothing's promised, though, and McCall knows that.

"I'm working on working," she said. "You just wait for your big break. Today I'm doing this. Tomorrow my life could change."

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