

# Kansan's pluck inspires film

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The Capital-Journal

**L**AURENCE — Moviegoers tonight will have the chance to see a Cinderella story whose once upon a time began in northeast Kansas.

"Erin Brockovich," which opens nationwide in theaters today, is the true tale of a Lawrence native who used her wit and wisdom to prove a major corporation had poisoned the water of a small town in California.

Brockovich, played in the movie by Julia Roberts, is out of money and talks her way into a job at a law firm. While performing menial tasks, Brockovich finds evidence that links contaminated water to illnesses in Hinkley, Calif. The cover-up she discovers ultimately leads to a \$333 million settlement.

Friends and family in Lawrence and the surrounding area say although Brockovich always was a remarkable character, they didn't dream that her struggles would lead to such wealth and fame.

"Erin brought herself from a bad place in her life and ended up doing quite well," said Susan Grey-Lauber, a childhood friend

**Continued on page 18-A, col. 1**



— The Associated Press

Lawrence native Erin Brockovich posed Tuesday with her husband, Eric Ellis, left, and Steven Soderbergh, who directed the film "Erin Brockovich," at the movie's premiere in Los Angeles. Julia Roberts plays Brockovich, whose work led to the settlement of a California pollution lawsuit.

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## Kansan

**Continued from page 1-A**

who lived down the street from Brockovich. "She told us how hard she was working and how important it was for her to reconcile this thing in Hinkley. It is kind of rags to riches."

Brockovich's parents, Frank and B.J. Pattee, still live in Lawrence, although Brockovich hasn't lived in town since she graduated from Lawrence High School in 1978.

Frank described his daughter as an average student who didn't get into trouble and enjoyed being with her friends. After high school, Brockovich attended Kansas State University for one semester before moving to Dallas, where she earned an applied arts degree from a fashion school, he said.

Brockovich's mother said that after college, her daughter moved to California and then Nevada before settling in Los Angeles. On the way, Brockovich was married and divorced twice and became the mother of three children.

It was when Brockovich realized that a corporation was poisoning a town that her life changed dramatically.

"A lot of people thought there was no case there, but she knew there was," B.J. said. "She really got to know those people. They liked her and communicated with her."

Frank and B.J., who saw the film at a sneak preview, said the script and production were true to Brockovich's story.

However, Frank said, it was difficult to watch his daughter go through tough times on the big screen.

"She missed out a lot with her

children, and that bothers her," he said. "But she has been paid back knowing all the people who she helped."

The director, producer and actors use words including "self-assured," "hero," "remarkable" and "determined" in Universal Studios interviews to describe the real person portrayed in the movie.

Grey-Lauber said when she sees Julia Roberts portray her friend, she believes cast and crew captured Brockovich's personality and style.

"I watch the clips and hear things Erin would say," Grey-Lauber said. "I know these are things that Erin would absolutely do. I'm just really proud of her. She's a good person."

"Erin Brockovich" opens today on two screens at West Ridge 8 Theaters, 1727 S.W. Wanamaker.