

## Win Win

By Tom Sims, Executive Director, Cape May Film Society

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Wrestling. You can wrestle with today's tough issues... with your spouse... your in-laws... your conscious. Or you can wrestle with the challenges of everyday life. Enter Mike Flaherty (played by Paul Giamatti in the new film *Win Win*), a lawyer who is wrestling to keep his law practice alive. A former student wrestler, he also coaches wrestling on the side for his alma mater. The team is about as successful as his law practice.

Just as his financial outlook is as grim as ever, he learns that one of his elderly clients Leo Poplar (Burt Young), who is wrestling with dementia, needs a guardian. The job pays \$1,500 per month. Mike tries to find Leo's daughter, but they cannot so it appears that Leo will be turned over as a ward of the state. So Mike takes the job, promises the judge and Leo that he can stay in his house (which the old man very much wants), then promptly parks him in a nursing home.

Despite that jerk move, Mike Flaherty is not at all a bad guy. Leo's grandson, Kyle (played by Alex Shaffer) runs away from Leo's elusive daughter (meaning that she is hard to pin down—sorry last wrestling gag no kidding!). Mike takes the teen in. Turns out Kyle is an expert wrestler, a fact that Mike has no trouble exploiting—until the truth comes out.

*Win Win* is a film about life's wrestling matches, the ones we have to face daily. And it is a fantastic comedy/drama. Giamatti is as convincing as ever, giving you insight into his flawed but loveable character. And he is surrounded by a cast of actors you have either seen for years in character roles or should keep your eye on as future stars. Amy Ryan plays Mike's wife, and while she doesn't always pull off the jersey girl attitude (the film is set in New Providence, NJ), she still delivers. Shaffer's portrayal of Leo's grandson, a kid who is both aloof and longing for deep, strong relationships, is wonderful.

And it is a who's who of character actors. You'll recognize Leo from TV and the *Rocky* movies. Jeff Tambor plays Mike's law associate, and you'll remember him in at least a half dozen other appearances. Melanie Lynskey, most popular as Rose on *Two and a Half Men* but making guest appearances in no fewer than three major feature films a year it seems, plays Kyle's Mom.

Writer/Director Tom McCarthy, who gave us such great films as *The Visitor* and *The Station Agent* (and if you had to see one, see *The Station Agent*) delivers again. A win for film lovers and story lovers alike.