

film review

By LAURA COOK

The Polar Express



Reuniting the team of Tom Hanks and director Robert Zemeckis, *The Polar Express* brings audiences on an extraordinary ride of adventure, fantasy and self-discovery. Transporting viewers through whimsical landscapes, the story of *The Polar Express* begins in the typical home of a small boy on Christmas Eve. When the young boy's belief in Santa Claus begins to waver, the whistle of a grand locomotive blares in his driveway ready to whisk him away to Santa's North Pole headquarters.

Once upon the train, the boy is lead, by the nameless conductor (whose voice is done by Tom Hanks) to meet the other doubtful children. The boy's fellow passengers include a headstrong young girl, an overconfident boy wonder, and a gloomy little lad from the wrong side of the tracks. The train ride is no normal chug along the tracks as each child is immersed in a fantasy world of singing waiters and endless cups of hot chocolate.

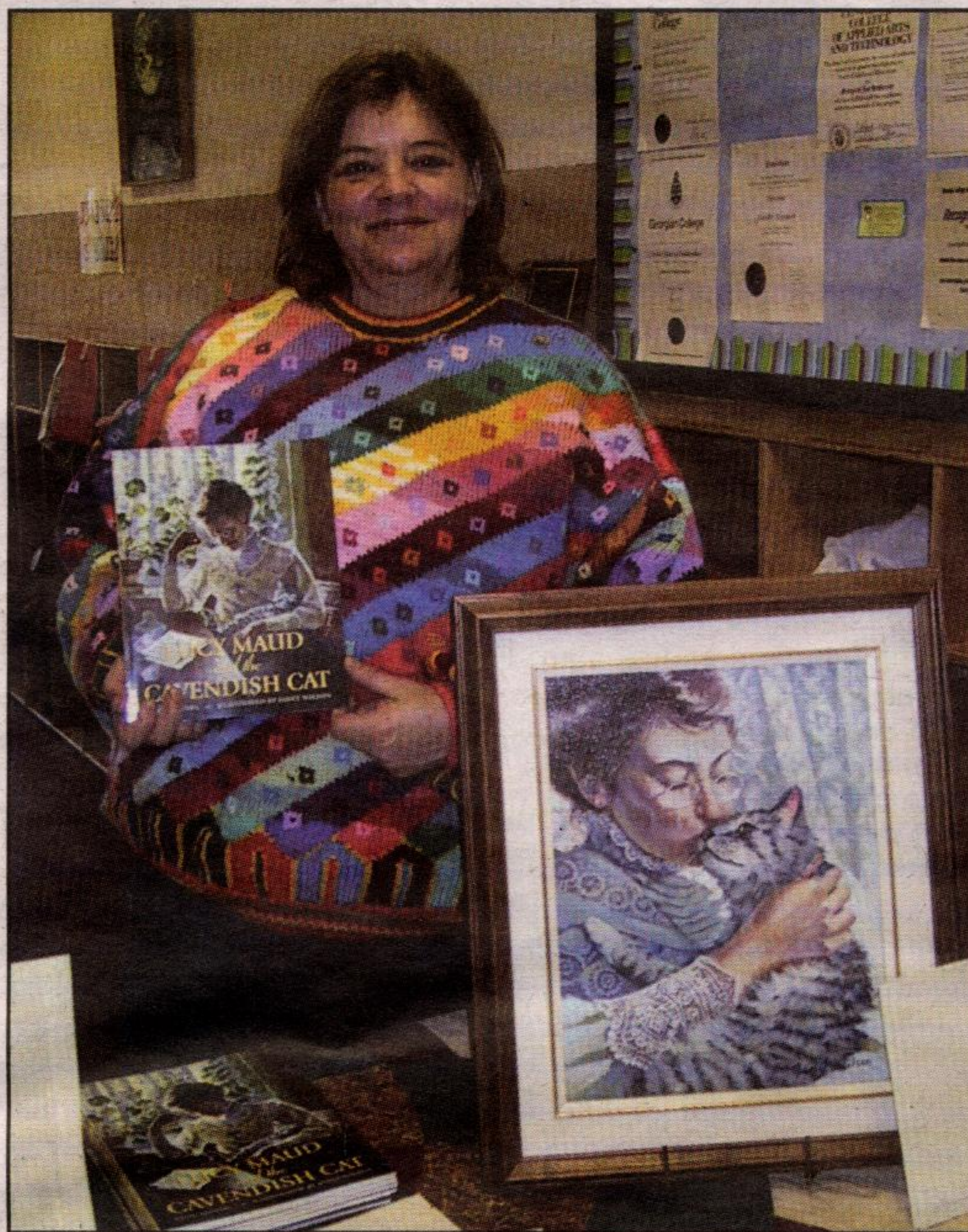
In a car of rambunctious children, the nameless boy is eventually forced out onto the roof to search for his mate's lost ticket. As he watches the passing landscape and crosses through blustery snowstorms, the boy encounters the ghost of a drifter who reappears at various points in the film.

Like any notable piece of children's literature, *The Polar Express* has just the right amount of edge that differentiates it from the typical fairytale story. The train must fight its way through various obstacles to get to the North Pole. Millions of wandering Caribou, frozen over railroad tracks and various other mechanical problems give the plot suspense and provide animators with great chances to show off their newfound technique of "performance capture" animation. Working with hundreds of visual effects artists at Sony Imageworks, Zemeckis, the director of *The Polar Express* creates a visually spectacular animation style by digitally capturing actor's live images via computerized cameras. The result is a human blueprint for creating the virtual characters that audiences see onscreen in the film.

While the story lays the groundwork for the typical lesson to never stop believing (in Santa Claus), it inevitably leaves most audience members in awe with the lifelike depiction of the characters, and a warm fuzzy feeling that the holidays are right around the corner.

Montgomery Christmas in Norval

PHOTOS BY DEB QUAILE



Eden Mills artist Janet Wilson attended Montgomery Christmas in Norval on November 27 to sign copies of her book *Lucy Maud and the Cavendish Cat*, and offer collectors a chance to purchase some of the original pencil and charcoal illustrations in the children's picture book.



Jack and Linda Hutton of Bala's Museum, a spot known for its memories of Lucy Maud Montgomery, are enthusiastic Montgomery and *Anne of Green Gables* collectors. The Huttons recreated the first silent movie of Anne with a selection of stills that they have painstakingly turned into a slide show. They also tracked down the original musical score that was played in movie houses during the first 1919 motion picture that Jack plays live on a keyboard to enhance the illusion of traveling through time 85 years ago to its first release. All copies of the early Anne film were destroyed by the producers due to a scandal that involved its promising principal actress, Mary Miles Minter. The Huttons hope to release the story of their detective work later in 2005, along with why Minter disappeared from the Hollywood scene.

Alysha Sizzles

By ANN KORNUA



The Mohawk Inn rocked to the country sounds of Alysha whose CD release party was held there last Friday. The talented country singer is one of the fresh new faces on the block on the Canadian country music scene. The Rockwood native's dazzling voice is matched by her knock out looks. Family, friends and fans all came out to support Alysha that evening.

Musical performances by Adam Farrell and band started the evening rocking, warming the crowd up for Alysha's arrival. By 9:30, Alysha took the stage with the Dan Younger Band and gave it her all; performing selections from her debut CD as well as popular country hits. On stage with Alysha was a special dance performance by a posse of seven young cowgirls that gave the night a fun atmosphere.

Look for Alysha's new CD "*Nothin' But A Chevy*" and taste the new sound of Canadian Country today.



Getting their groove on the dance floor, these young dancers help bring the house down with Alysha at her CD release party.