

Between out-of-town acting gigs, Ruck likes to relax in front of one of his favorite haunts, Bunbury's Coffee Shop in Piermont. Here, he starts off his day with its house-blend java.



Alan Ruck's day off

The star of *Ferris Bueller* and *Spin City* is cutting loose again—
this time in Piermont.

By Jenny Higgins • Photographs by Mark Vergari

Alan Ruck stands at the entrance of Bunbury's Coffee Shop, grinning like the Cheshire Cat. His long arms extend elastically in either direction, an oat muffin in one hand, a cup of coffee in the other. It's almost as if the actor is boasting about playing hooky from Hollywood, giddy about taking time off in Piermont. Known to many as Cameron Frye, the sidekick in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Ruck's demeanor bears no resemblance to the reluctant school-skipper's in the classic 1986 movie. And while the Detroit Red Wings jersey and perpetual grimace are also gone, his full head of hair—now flecked with gray—and lanky frame remain. It's still Cameron, Ferris's

baby-faced best bud, just a bit older and sporting a funky goatee.

"I love it here!" exclaims Ruck, the second he sees me in front of the coffee shop. Piermont has been Ruck's home for nine

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years, and in addition to being one of its most famous residents, he's also one of the village's biggest champions. "It's the nicest place I've ever lived," he says immediately after we meet. During a walk down

Piermont Avenue, he reels off tidbits of the hamlet's history—"It was once a fishing village and also an embarkation point for soldiers going off to war"—and greets fellow residents as they walk and bicycle past him. "It's kind of like Mayberry in Rockland," he observes. When I mention that the Tappan Zee Bridge's infamous traffic jams might scare people off from moving to the county, he replies with a sly smile, "Hey, you know what? They can stay out. We have just the right amount here now!"

Raised in Parma, Ohio, Ruck attended the University of Illinois–Chicago as a theater major and started his career on the Windy City stage. He's traveled the country for various feature films (*Speed*, *Cheaper*



On the town pier, a piece of land that juts seemingly halfway across the Hudson, Ruck takes in the grandeur and points out a handful of notable landmarks on the opposite shore.

by the Dozen), telepictures (*From the Earth to the Moon*), and guest spots on TV shows (*Scrubs*, *Mad About You*). Ruck's most enduring gig was as Stuart, the New York City mayor's chief of staff, in the six-season ABC sitcom *Spin City*. When that show wrapped in 2002, he returned to the theater to star for four months on Broadway in *The Producers*—inhabiting the role of Leo Bloom, a role revived, coincidentally, by his *Bueller* costar Matthew Broderick. Two months ago he finished shooting the Sci Fi Network's Vancouver-filmed TV series *Stargate Atlantis*, whose third season kicked off last month.

But no matter where Ruck's jobs take him, he always relishes his return to Piermont. He confides to me that, even after the 2005 demise of his marriage, he couldn't leave. He sold the expansive, yellow, purple-shuttered house that he shared with his wife, Claudia, and their two kids—18-year-old Emma, a singer off to the Conservatory of Music at Baldwin-Wallace College in

Ohio, and 12-year-old Sam, a local middle-schooler—and rented a more modest abode just a few blocks away.

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An avid outdoorsman, Ruck takes me to see one of his favorite views in the county, at the zenith of Tallman Mountain State Park. Soaking in the expansive vista below, he says, "I love the Hudson River Valley. The river is inspiring. It

makes me think, 'Yeah, there's a god.' I find it comforting that there's still stuff like giant sturgeons swimming around down in there." Later, when we stop by the town's riverside pier, Ruck resumes the role of tour guide, pointing out landmarks on the opposite shore: Main Street and the Ardsley-on-Hudson train station in Irvington, and historic homes like Lyndhurst and Sunnyside in Tarrytown.

Although much of Ruck's work requires him to be in California, Piermont will be his primary residence for at least six more years, until Sam graduates from high school. "If money were no object, a nice apartment in the city and then a farm somewhere upstate would be ideal," he says. "But that's probably not going to happen, so this is a great compromise. I can get into the city in a flash, and then I get to come home to a really peaceful area. It's just perfect for me."

The actor can thank *Spin City* for his move to Rockland. He and his family had



RUCK'S RESUMÉ

His career at a glance:

- Kickin' It Old Skool* (2006)
- The Producers* (Broadway show, 2005)
- Cheaper by the Dozen* (2003)
- From the Earth to the Moon* (1998)
- Spin City* (TV series, 1996–2002)
- Twister* (1996)
- Mad About You* (TV series, 1996–1997)
- Speed* (1994)
- Young Guns II* (1990)
- Three for the Road* (1987)
- Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986)
- Class* (1983)

been living in Los Angeles for seven years when he was asked to become a regular on the new ABC series, which was to be shot in New York City. They first rented a house in Rye, which Ruck found a bit staid for his taste. When the show turned into a hit a year later, they decided it was time to put down roots. He and his wife were familiar with Rockland during their early days of marriage, living in upper Manhattan and often taking road trips to Nyack.

“One Sunday in 1997, we went looking at houses all day and found nothing really right,” he recalls. “Everyone was kind of mopey, so I said, ‘Who wants to go to Nyack?’ and they all answered, ‘Great!’ So we drove there, started snooping around, eventually discovered Piermont, and found a unique fixer-upper—which soon became our house for the past nine years.”

The Rucks quickly came to prefer Piermont over The City of Angels, especially when it came to Emma and Sam. “I’d let my children walk to their friends’ houses here,” Ruck explains. “But I wouldn’t

“There are all sorts of great outdoor activities around here—fishing, canoeing, and hiking—because of the Hudson and Tallman,” he says here, at Tallman Mountain State Park.



even think of allowing that in L.A. because there’s something inherently dangerous about the city. Everybody wants to be in show business. Everyone’s worth is measured in dollar bills, what kind of car you drive, and all that kind of silly crap. I don’t think it’s a good place for kids to grow up, although I know that a lot of kids grow up there and turn out just fine.” That’s not to say that Ruck dislikes everything about California. “I have a ball when I’m working there,” he says. Which is a good thing, because when Michael J. Fox bowed out of *Spin City*, the show moved there and hired Charlie Sheen to fill out the cast. That left Ruck with a schedule in which he’d work on the series for three weeks, return to

Piermont for up to nine days, and then head back to the West Coast.

Over a hamburger at Piermont Avenue’s Harbour House, Ruck tells me about a freak, life-threatening incident that happened during the latter days of *Spin City*, in December 2001. Two days before he was to go home for a holiday break, he woke up feeling lousy—or, as Cameron termed it in his opening scene of *Bueller*, “shredded”—and chalked it up to a horrible flu. The next day, a mentally disoriented Ruck flew to New York with costar Barry Bostwick and took a car service home to Piermont. The driver, who didn’t speak English, accidentally dropped him off at an unfinished apartment building. Ruck then spent the next few hours lying in the

RUCK | RECOMMENDS

Xaviars: "Top notch." (506 Piermont Ave.; Piermont; 359-7007; xaviars.com).

Restaurant X: "Beautiful, fantastic food." (117 N. Rte 303; Congers; 268-6555; xaviars.com).

Relish: "A very high-end gourmet hole in the wall." (4 Depot Square; Sparkill; 398-2747; relish.sparkill.com).

lobby, writhing in a delirious fever, hoping to be found. "I swear to God," he says, shaking his head, "some little guardian angel said, 'Get up! You've gotta get your butt out of here.' So I went outside, got my bearings, and walked home."

His wife rushed him to Nyack Hospital, where he was unconscious for nine days. The culprit? A vicious strain of strep lurking in an L.A. pool or hot tub that he'd just spent time in. The bacteria invaded his body via a cut on his toe and then wormed its way into his bloodstream. "Little pieces of crap flew into my brain and gave me stroke-like symptoms," he remembers. "My heart was affected, my kidneys failed, I was on dialysis for 10 weeks, and I lost 25 pounds. After the first few days, the doctors decided that I'd live but maybe not with all of my 'facilities.' After I woke up, they said, 'His brain is back, but he'll spend the rest of his life on dialysis.'" Something—perhaps that guardian angel—intervened, and his maladies faded away one by one. He spent a total of six weeks in the hospital and was then sent to Helen Hayes in Haverstraw for rehab. "And I'm probably healthier now than I was before it happened."

It's hard to argue with that, especially when the 50-year-old actor doesn't look all that much older than Cameron, who he played at age 29. "People have recognized me for different things over the years, and I've heard, 'You look familiar. How do I know you?' Now it's pretty much a 50/50

In a moment of whimsy, Ruck dons a fez, shades, and a fuzzy cotton bathrobe to pose on the master-bedroom deck of his former house, which was then unoccupied.



split between *Ferris Bueller* and *Spin City*." And being called "Cameron" on the street doesn't upset him anymore either: "It really bothered me only when I didn't have an acting job and was convinced that I'd never work again. I'd think, 'I'm a one-trick pony, everyone's seen the trick, and it's all over.' Now I'm really happy that I was part of something people got a kick out of."

In an ironic coda to Ruck's strep story, his most recent film gig was in *Kickin' It Old Skool*, a Jamie Kennedy comedy about a guy who goes into a 20-year coma after a freak break-dancing accident. But not everything on his docket is a bizarre parallel to his personal life. He just shot the pilot for a one-hour action drama series for Fox called *Drive*, in which he plays an

unlikely action hero—a college professor—engaged in a high-stakes, illegal road race. If the network picks up the show, it will be a 2006–07 midseason replacement, which means that Ruck will have to stop playing hooky and return to his grinding Piermont-to-California commute.

No big deal, though, because he considers his close encounter with death to be his midlife wake-up call. "I'd fallen into the routine of just taking things—my health, being one of them—for granted," he says. "But you could get hit by a bus tomorrow! We spend so much time worrying about stuff we have absolutely no control over and forget to just be here and enjoy being alive. Right now, I'm having a ball!" Especially when he's in Piermont. 🍷