

YOUR HEALTH



Getty Images/Goodshoot RF

Who should focus on an eye exam, and why

TODAY'S AGENDA

Be a Cowboy Idol

Hey, you with the scuffed-up boots and the old guitar: You could be the Fort Worth Stockyards Cowboy Idol. Tryouts are Tuesday, and today is your last chance to register. Here's what will happen: You'll audition Tuesday night with a two-minute singing performance at Billy Bob's Texas. (Yes, the song you sing has to be an original composition, so — quick! — dig something out of that song notebook you've been scribbling in since high school.) The top 10 singers will sing Saturday at the Stockyards Day of the American Cowboy celebration. And the winner gets a cash jackpot, a pair of Justin boots, a one-year membership to the Fort Worth Songwriters Association, and the chance to open for a headline artist at Billy Bob's. If you want to audition, sign up between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. today at the Stockyards Visitors Center, 130 E. Exchange Ave. Cost is \$15 (cash or check). You'll have to hand over the lyrics to the two-minute song you're planning to sing, along with a bio or résumé if you have one. More details: www.fortworthstockyards.org.



AP

'Monster' movie

Get out of the heat and into a fun-filled seat at Studio Movie Grill in Arlington for an exciting film and tasty meal for the whole family. The 2010 Summer Children's Series presents a weekly showing of top animated movies, Monday through Thursday, through Aug. 19. This week's family film is *Monsters vs. Aliens*, an animated movie about a woman who is hit by a meteorite and transformed into a monster. She is taken away to a secret agency with other amusing monsters who join together to stop aliens from destroying the planet. All films start at 11 a.m. \$2 for adults; \$1 for kids 10 and under. 817-466-4440. Visit www.studiomoviegrill.com for more details. Have an item for Agenda? Send it to listings@star-telegram.com.

WHAT'S AHEAD



Star-Telegram/Ron Jenkins

TUE Are longboards the way to get around? **In Your Life**

WED Ways to cut back on sodium **In Your Life**

THU Wrapping up the Kids Cooking Club **In Your Life**



Two California women decided that acts of kindness should be in the cards, and so far people around the world are hitting the deck

Play nice

By Alyson Ward
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When you're talking to Mary Beth Campbell, it's hard to feel cynical.

And that's tough, because we *like* feeling cynical.

But Campbell is the co-founder of a company called Boom Boom! (The exclamation point isn't ours.) She is determined to get people to do some good in the world, one unprompted smile or anonymous gift or

Good to know

Boom Boom! cards are available online at www.boomboomcards.com. They cost \$9.99 per kit except for the family edition, which is \$14.99.

Campbell's small company, based in California (full name: Boom Boom! Revolution) started about three years ago with a simple deck of cards. On each card, an act of kindness:

"Buy a stranger a cup of coffee."

"Give five genuine compliments in one day!"

"For one day, whenever your cellphone rings or vibrates in the middle of a conversation, ignore it . . . finish the conversation first."

The cards, designed to make us mindfully considerate and serendipitously generous, first started selling in late 2007. A website — boomboomcards.com — launched a year later, urging

More on NICE, 4E

Star-Telegram photo illustration: Source: Thinkstock

'Covert Affairs' satisfies Perabo's thrill-seeking

New series ▣ Dallas-born actress embraces the spy life

By David Martindale
Special to the Star-Telegram

When Piper Perabo was a kid, she wasn't the type to play "girls" games.

"I was a tomboy," the Dallas-born actress says. "I was jumping off the roof, stuff like that."

Perabo is grown. But it's clear that the star of *Covert Affairs*, a new action-packed spy series that runs at 9 p.m. Tuesdays on the USA channel, is still a thrill-seeking kid at heart.

"We're jumping off buildings, jumping down elevator shafts, crashing cars," she says. "So I enjoy it even more. Also, my mom isn't there to stop me!"

Like her character, rookie CIA agent Annie Walker, Perabo seems to be up for anything.

One of her few disappointments in making *Covert Affairs* came when a stunt double was brought in to perform a parachute dive from a plane.

"I would have jumped out," she says, "but USA would never have let me do it."

Covert Affairs
▣ 9 p.m. Tuesdays
▣ USA channel

There's no show without Perabo, who is perhaps best known for the movie *Coyote Ugly*, so can you blame the network for grounding her?

Covert Affairs is the story of a gifted CIA trainee who is unexpected-

More on SERIES, 4E



Covert Affairs star Piper Perabo

USA Network/Robert Ascroft

Nice

Continued from 1E

users to log in, report their good deeds and interact. And just last week, Boom Boom! Revolution released two new editions of the cards, a family version and an eco-friendly deck. The inevitable Boom Boom! iPhone app is on its way next month. Kindness, it seems, is catching on.

Free lattes

Intrigued — but wary — we called Campbell up to ask her about Boom Boom! cards.

"It's not rocket science," she says.

Campbell is the first to admit it. And Boom Boom! isn't treading anywhere that Pay It Forward and Random Acts of Kindness haven't gone before. But she and her business partner, Hélène Scott, have built full-time jobs out of encouraging altruism, and it's working for them.

Boom Boom! cards sell online for \$9.99 (a portion of your purchase goes to charity, natch); they've had orders from all over the United States and such far-away places as Sweden, Egypt and Australia. And every day, people log on to the website to share their stories:

"[B]ought a latte for the lady in the white car behind me in the drive-through this morning," says a user in Missouri. "Looked like she could really use a break!"

"... [O]ur bill was just short of \$10," writes a woman in Iowa. "I went to the register to pay and rounded it up to \$30. The hostess looked a little shocked and started to say something. I stopped her in her tracks with 'it's right,' smiled, signed my name and headed out. It made my day to do this, I hope it made hers, too!"

And this from a teacher in Wisconsin, who complimented a student: "I told her that I really liked her shoes... which I truly did. She looked up at me like I was speaking a foreign language and said, 'What?' I repeated the compliment, her face turned the brightest shade of red, and then she responded, 'Thanks. Nobody ever notices stuff like that about me.'"

See? It's not easy to stay jaded and snarky in the face of such guileless... bigheartedness.

Learning to be nice

Here's how Boom Boom! cards came about. Campbell taught high-school English for seven years, and she got involved in a program that used older kids in high school to mentor incoming freshmen. Yes — the seniors, who usually just make fun of the new kids, were charged with making that first year



Boom Boom! cards have been ordered by people as far away as Sweden and Australia.

Star-Telegram/Ross Hailey

of high school a little easier.

"I used to be a very cynical person," Campbell says. (We knew it.) "I never thought this would work."

But she was surprised, just totally blown away, by how willing the students were to help — not because there was any reward for it, but because it was the right thing to do.

"These teenagers looked at me," Campbell says, "and said, 'Be nice to freshmen? We can do that!'"

She decided then that most people, when asked, are perfectly happy to do good in the world. It's just that — get this — we're almost never really asked.

"We don't often ask each other — or ask ourselves — to step up," Campbell says. "But once you do, it's very easy."

Those high-school kids were Campbell's inspiration.

"I said, if we can ask high-school students to be these kind, compassionate people, why can't we do this for the world? Why can't we create a structure for people to just do cool things for each other?"

That's when it all started. Campbell, who had helped found an organization that offers transition programs for middle-school and high-school students, was a writer and



Boom Boom! Revolution co-founders Hélène Scott, left, and Mary Beth Campbell

Boom Boom! Revolution

a creative thinker. Scott, the organization's design director, was an accomplished artist. The two decided to work together to make products that would inspire the same kind of generosity that they witnessed in students every day.

Their first idea: a deck of cards. Each card would name an act of kindness, challenging you to do something good for the world. You'd take the challenge, do the good deed, then pass the card on to someone else. One good act would inspire another, creating a ripple effect.

"It was a several-month process," Campbell says. After soliciting suggestions from everyone they

knew, the two sat down with a long list of ideas, then set about condensing all that niceness into a deck of pretty, Scott-designed cards.

"We went through rounds and rounds," Campbell says. "We wanted to balance those that required money with those that didn't require money at all, and things that were difficult to do with the things people did anyway?"

In late 2007, they started selling the cards at a couple of stores in Santa Cruz, Calif. They were enough of a hit that Campbell and Scott decided to expand; the Boom Boom! website came a year later, with the decks of cards sold online. And by 2009, a

web community began to build, with people logging on to share the good things they'd done, received or witnessed, all prompted by Boom Boom! cards.

Back at you

Now, about that name. How did a company devoted to nice end up with a name like "Boom Boom!"?

The name comes from the concept of a boomerang.

"A boomerang goes out and comes back to you," Campbell says. "We like the notion that it makes a full revolution — boom boom — it comes out and it goes back!"

A little bit of karma, if you will.

Campbell acknowledges that "kindness isn't sexy, really" — and that promoting kindness is usually associated with "this kind of schmaltzy, dippy feeling."

"We think kindness gets a bad rap," Campbell says. "We want to rebrand kindness!"

'Planted a seed'

If anything has, Pay It Forward has done a lot for re-branding kindness. The Pay It Forward concept — instead of returning a favor, you pass that kindness along to someone else — became part of the zeitgeist in 2000, when Catherine Ryan Hyde published a novel called *Pay It Forward* that inspired a movie starring Haley Joel Osment. Hyde now leads the nonprofit Pay It Forward Foundation, dedicated to inspiring acts of kindness in families and classrooms.

We talked to Anna Unkovich, the foundation's education director, about whether good deeds can really be, well, prompted in that Boom Boom! Card way.

Why not? she asked.

"I think anytime we can inspire people to do kind things," Unkovich says, "we all feel better."

Unkovich started out as a teacher, too. She used to read *Chicken Soup for the Soul* stories to her students, and she saw how all that focus on goodness and good will turned her wild middle-schoolers into these thoughtful, generous, cooperative creatures that she barely recognized. In other words, kindness worked. So a few years ago, when she moved to California, Unkovich got involved with Pay It Forward.

"With the Pay It Forward concept, you never know whether they're going to follow through or not," she says, but that's OK.

"It almost doesn't matter, because the act of doing good yourself — you've done your part," she says, and besides, "you've planted a seed."

Unkovich says she looks for opportunities to commit small, unexpected acts of good. She has paid for the cars behind her on toll

bridges. She has anonymously sent flowers. When we talked to her, she had just finished packing up a bag of goodies for some friends embarking on a road trip.

Since she started being more mindful about her acts of kindness, Unkovich says, it has made a difference — for others, of course, and for herself.

"I'm aware of the fact that I'm happier," she says. "Even if they haven't followed through [and paid it forward], I just feel good having done some good, nice, little silly thing."

Opening doors

And, well, that's the whole point of Boom Boom! cards, too.

"I think a lot of us want to do good and be good, but we don't know how or what to do," Campbell says. "We want to give people ideas for how to contribute to making the world better."

She can tell stories about Boom Boom! cards that have been passed on and "double played" — one started out in Washington and ended up in Turkey. But for the most part, she says, people are logging on to the Boom Boom! website just to report what they have done. Users' stories range from the simple — *I held the door open for a stranger* — to complicated tales of apologizing to family members, reconnecting with old friends and going far out of the way to surprise someone with kindness.

The two brand-new editions of Boom Boom! cards put a new twist on the basic concept. One, a Green deck, encourages "intentional acts of greenness." That might mean carrying a refillable water bottle instead of getting a plastic bottle every time you're thirsty. Or it might be: "Read Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* to a child and talk about it."

The Family edition, meanwhile, is designed for families with young children to use together. It has a Command Central activity board with pictures of all the cards; when the cards are played, you cover each one with a sticker. The prompts encourage outward activities — "Gather all your used books and donate them to a school or your local library" — and some family-bonding experiences: "Create a fort in the living room with the whole family!"

"We want to put products out in the world," Campbell says, "that enhance our world and inspire people to look around and say, 'Hey, I can make this world a better place. I can show up and be a positive influence on our world and on our culture!'"

It is painfully hard to be cynical about that.

Alyson Ward, 817-390-7988

Series

Continued from 1E

edly promoted to field operative. In Annie's first mission, she poses as a call girl in a classic espionage info switch; minutes later, she finds herself dodging a sniper's barrage of bullets. This is the unpredictable career she has signed up for.

Meanwhile, in the eyes of friends and family, she leads an ordinary, humdrum life.

If the show's premise sounds a little like *Alias: The Early Years*, as if Annie is a Sydney Bristow without the benefit of extensive training, it's a fair comparison.

A key difference, though, is that *Covert Affairs* is more grounded in stranger-than-fiction reality. Annie's CIA is populated by nothing but young, beautiful people, for example, but it's not just because the show's casting people wanted pretty faces. The explanation offered by Annie's "handler,"

Auggie Anderson (played by Christopher Gorham), is that 50 percent of agency personnel have five years or less of experience, the result of a hiring freeze that was unfrozen after 9-11.

Perabo, who spent a day at the CIA's Langley headquarters in Virginia, confirms that it is true.

"I met agents who are the same age as Chris, and I and talked with them about their lives," she says. "A lot of the things that we're drawing from for the show are based in the dirty details of reality."

Here's another: There are often complicated romantic entanglements between agency co-workers in *Covert Affairs*, but that's not just a case of writers weaving in soap-opera elements to juice up the story and to justify the show title's double meaning. Those relationships are plausible, it turns out, because the CIA actually encourages interoffice dating and marriage. This policy helps keep CIA secrets in-house.

"I'm still kind of surprised by that," Perabo says. "But the more you understand how secret you have to keep everything and how



Auggie Anderson (Christopher Gorham) and Annie Walker (Piper Perabo) are young CIA agents in the series *Covert Affairs*.

USA Network/Steve Wilkie

compartmentalized your life becomes, I understand why. One of the agents told me that his wife

doesn't even know he works for the CIA. That's how secret it has to be. Every person you tell, it

puts them in danger. The CIA policy, they tell me, is that you're allowed to tell whoever you want, just with the realization that that's going to put them in danger the more that they know?"

Perabo's technical adviser, by the way, became perhaps the most famous female CIA operative of the 21st century after her cover was blown: Valerie Plame Wilson. "We have connections," Perabo says.

The experience of researching her role has deepened her appreciation for her real-life counterparts.

"One thing I liked when I met them was the reason they gave for being there," Perabo says. "One of the agents I spoke to was saying, 'I serve at the pleasure of the president, regardless of who the president is! So it's bigger than any momentary political agenda for them. They believe in the ideals of this country.'"

"That was kind of an old-fashioned and forthright mission statement that I didn't expect. It sort of charmed me in a way that I didn't anticipate when I first got to the CIA."