

Fresh filmmakers bring Hollywood to Connecticut

By Laura Kenyon

On screen it's a story about a camp full of rowdy kids, a housekeeper straight out of their nightmares, a demoted movie director and a bulldog named Archie. Off screen, it's the story of a starry-eyed screenwriter and a rising director who decided if Hollywood wouldn't come to them, they would bring Hollywood to Connecticut.

Nutmeg Pictures, a new company started by New Canaan's Joanne Powell and Stratford's Garret C. Maynard, began filming last week for its debut movie, "FilmCAMP: Reel I."

Ms. Powell, who has worked in advertising and marketing for more than 20 years, met Mr. Maynard when she enrolled in his screenwriting

class at Norwalk Community College.

"Joanne showed a strong aptitude for screenwriting," said Mr. Maynard, who also owns a production and literary agency, and who has been nominated for a cinematography Emmy for his work on the documentary, "Mystic Voices: The Story of the Pequot War."

Encouraged, Ms. Powell began writing several screenplays. She received a great deal of interest in one called "Jersey John," based on a true story about a "maniacal" Baltimore Colts fan who loses his identity when the team suddenly moves to Indianapolis.

But when the head of development of a Hollywood production company leaned across the meeting table and

told her, "I've got the job, and I can't even get a movie made," she decided it was time to take matters into her own hands.

"After all these years of frustration and trying to sell one of her works," Mr. Maynard said, he told her, "make a movie that shows off your writing."

"The job of people in Hollywood is to say no," Ms. Powell said. "We needed to have something to showcase our ability."

So they teamed up.

"Gary and I have complimentary skills," Ms. Powell said. "Gary from behind the camera, me from production."

And in the fall of 2004, Nutmeg

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IN CHARACTER — Above, Mikie Baldarelli (left) and Evan Gambardella, both of North Haven, pose as their characters, Barry and Leonard, in "FilmCAMP: Reel I," being filmed in New Canaan. Below, make-up artist Linda Hurst (left) and Patricia Sanger Cook, in costume as Pat Slabb, pose with Archie. Both women are from New Canaan. (Laura Kenyon Photos)



Nutmeg: Local filmmakers bring Hollywood to Connecticut

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Pictures was formed.

The goal of the production company, Mr. Maynard said, is to make progressive, family entertainment.

"We're not going to try to push the envelope in a way that might be outdated," he said, adding that 50-year-olds and five-year-olds should enjoy Nutmeg's films.

The name was chosen to emphasize the beauty and lifestyle of Connecticut, which he referred to by its nickname, "The Nutmeg State."

"FilmCAMP: Reel I" is a low-budget, independent feature-length comedy about Ted Putterbaugh, a Hollywood director who is accused of financial irresponsibility by his corrupt

producer and sent to run a B-class film camp in the Connecticut wilderness, where he has many misadventures at the hands of out-of-control kids.

"Think 'Bad News Bears' go to film camp," Ms. Powell said.

Mr. Maynard, who used to work at a summer film camp himself, said he noticed a trend of movies teaming kids with adults, including this summer's "The Bad News Bears" remake and "Kicking & Screaming."

Co-producers, Mr. Maynard and Ms. Powell hope this film will be the first of many, and will pave the way for big budget films such as "Jersey John."

"It is set up to be a franchise," said Ms. Powell, "to reach the widest possible audience."

For this reason, "FilmCAMP" is being shot in the more versa-

tile high definition format, and has secured product placement partnerships with Pepsi-Cola, Frito-Lay and Ty, Inc.

Ms. Powell and Mr. Maynard posted casting notices in several publications, and held auditions at the New Canaan Library.

"We had, like, 11-year-olds belting out songs from 'Annie,'" she said, "even though there's no singing in the movie. (The people at the library) were very patient."

According to Ms. Powell, the entire crew and seven of the nine child actors are from Connecticut.

"We got the best results from the citizens of Connecticut," she said, although actors came as far as Philadelphia. "There is a very rich, deep talent pool in Connecticut."

New Canaan resident Callie Talbot spent last summer looking after Ms. Powell's children, but this year she is "FilmCAMP's" costume designer.

"It's a lot more work than I thought," she said, "but very rewarding."

Mikie Baldarelli and Evan Gambardella, both 13 years old, play best friends and troublemakers. They had leading roles in North Haven Middle School's spring production of "The Wizard of Oz," but "FilmCAMP" marks their movie debut.

"I'm a nerd," Evan says about his character, Leonard, who tucks in his clothes and wears short shorts and sports socks under his sandals. "I always coordinate my yarmulke with my socks."

Mikie plays Barry, whom he

describes as "a bully," adding "who thinks just because he's been here for four years he owns the camp."

Together, Barry and Leonard are responsible for terrorizing Ted by dousing him with shaving cream and holding his "pet," Mr. Prickles (a Ty Beanie Baby hedgehog), hostage for a ransom of 10,000 gourmet jelly beans.

"It's hard work but it's a lot of fun," said Evan, "especially in the hot sun."

The sun, and the 80 degree temperatures that have accompanied it, is the main focus for makeup artist Linda Hurst, a New Canaan resident of 15 years.

"Sweat control," she said. "That's my big job."

Ms. Hurst, a native of Britain, was trained by the BBC and has been a makeup artist for 25 years. After working on many historic productions requiring period wigs and makeup, "FilmCAMP" is "not as complicated" because the children don't need makeup and the adults are very natural.

Although plenty of girls in the cast want their hair done all the time, Ms. Hurst is very careful when it comes to makeup and children.

"There's a fine dividing line between being a child and being a little lady," she said. So she simply gives them "a bit of lip gloss" and sends them frolicking away.

The character who requires most of Ms. Hurst's attention is her friend Patricia Sanger Cook, another New Canaan resident.

Clad in an apron and glasses with curler-shaped hair, and an English Bulldog in tow, Ms. Cook plays Pat Slabb, the feared camp housekeeper, cook and custodian.

We contemplated several English housekeeper looks for her character, Ms. Hurst said, including covering her hair with a kerchief or keeping it constantly in curlers. But they decided the funniest look was the one women have when they take the curlers off their heads but don't brush them out. Thus was born Pat Slabb.

"This is going much better than I thought it would," Ms. Cook said. Active in the New Canaan International Group Pantomime and the New Canaan Academy of Tap, this is Ms. Cook's first movie role.

"I did it for Joanne," she said, unsure whether she would do it again.

Ms. Cook's son is also involved in the film, as is their pet. Andrew Cook, 16, is responsible for making Archie happy. He calls his role that of "pet wrangler," and said that despite his character in the film, the brown and white bulldog is harmless, and usually sleeping.

Despite having to control hordes of children and a dog, and minus one illness the first day of shooting, Mr. Maynard said filming has gone pretty smoothly so far.

The three weeks of shooting are taking place at the Roger Sherman Inn and two residences in New Canaan, as well as the Avon Theatre in Stamford.

In addition to time and space, Nutmeg Pictures has received donations of food and props, and the producers are very grateful. It will list "patrons and special friends" on its Web site, nutmegpictures.com.

"We've had enormous support from the Town of New Canaan," said Ms. Powell, who hopes the film will be available by summer of 2006.

Ms. Hurst, who has been witness to most of the process, is happy Ms. Powell is finally seeing one of her works come to life.

"It's great for Joanne because she's been planning and dreaming of this for a long time now and it's finally materialized," she said. "She's been planning it for ages."

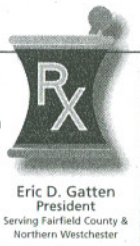
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Oh, most beautiful flower of Mt. Carmel, fruitful vine splendor of Heaven. Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. O, Star of the Sea, help me and show me, herein you are my Mother. Oh Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth! I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart to succor me in my necessity. There is no one that can withstand your power. Oh, show me herein that you are my mother. Oh, Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee (say three times). Holy Mary, I place this cause for your hands (say three times). Holy Spirit, you who solve all problems, light all roads so that I can attain my goal. You who gave me the divine gift to forgive and forget all evil against me and that in all instances in my life you are with me. I want in this short prayer to thank you for all things as you confirm once again that I never want to be separated from you in eternal glory. Thank you for your mercy toward me and