

Students get Hollywood experience in own backyard

by David Williams - Friday, April 25, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/784/students-get-hollywood-experience-in-own-backyard/>

Some students become radio/TV/film majors because they dream of going to Hollywood. Seldom does Hollywood come a-calling when they are still enrolled.

When “Public Enemies,” a big-budget action movie directed by Michael Mann and starring Christian Bale and Johnny Depp, chose downtown Oshkosh for one of its filming sites, radio/TV/film students at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh were invited to apply for internships.

“Our whole major got an e-mail from the production company,” said Tara Budz, a senior from Sobieski. “We had to submit resumes and had interviews.”

As an intern, Budz worked with the extras casting unit, interacting with the mostly local actors who were hired for nonspeaking roles.

“I dealt with phone calls and pictures, booking them for scenes,” she said.

While most of Budz’s work was behind the scenes — so to speak — she did have the opportunity to watch the production of one shoot.

“I saw one scene being filmed in front of the bank. I was just sitting in the New Moon, watching,” Budz said.

During the filming, she got to see superstar Johnny Depp, who plays the role of John Dillinger at the height of his criminal escapades.

“I wasn’t star struck, but it didn’t feel like I was in Oshkosh anymore,” she said.

Nick Ekum, a junior radio/TV/film student at UW Oshkosh, worked with wardrobe setup, scheduling wardrobe fittings, contacting extras and designing flyers.

“I ran errands for the people running the extras. I was a gopher,” said Ekum, of Monroe.

But when he heard that his supervisor was looking for help from someone with computer experience, Ekum volunteered for additional responsibilities.

“I made a template for a video Web page and ripped and edited a casting call for dancing auditions in Chicago for clients,” he said.

For Ekum, signing up for the “Public Enemies” was a no-brainer.

“I wanted to be involved in moviemaking my entire life,” he said. “I’m just really happy that a film production company came to Oshkosh. It’s pretty much a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a town this size.”

UW Oshkosh students weren’t the only ones hoping to get caught up in the silver-screen excitement. Several University staff members took vacation time to help with various aspects of production, including building the set, which transformed a section of Main Street into a 1930s snapshot.

Residence Life director Tom Fojtik went to a casting call “on a lark” and ended up appearing in a couple of scenes.

“It was very, very interesting, if exhausting,” he said, adding that between 30 and 35 takes apiece were required for each scene. “The first night was that Friday night in the rain, and we were out there for seven hours. The second day was 14 hours.”

In one scene Fojtik ended up about five feet from Depp.

“It was very cool. He didn’t come onto the set until it was time for him. We were very close to him,” he said of the scene, in which he played an aggressive reporter, shouting questions at the notorious Dillinger.

Fojtik said he gained from the experience an appreciation for how hard moviemakers work, especially the crew.

“I was impressed with the level of detail they gave to even the extras,” he said.

While the filming of “Public Enemies” put the Oshkosh community in the spotlight, the arrival of a movie production company in the area also has afforded University students with invaluable out-of-the-classroom experience.

“I learned a lot more about an element of filmmaking that I never really thought about,” Butz said.

Ekum, too, says he has benefited from the radio/TV/film internship.

“I got a better view of film production, how much time and resources go into it,” he said.