

'Diamond' found in courtroom

Published: September 22, 2011

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WILLIMANTIC - A tale of redemption, where audiences can actually root for the bad guy, will soon put the Thread City on the silver screen once again.

"Diamond Ruff " - directed by Alec Asten - features Fredro Starr ("Save the Last Dance," "Sunset Park"), and comedian Michael Colyar. It was filmed the last two days in town.

Based on the book "Diamond Ruff " written by Joe Young Jr., dramatic courtroom scenes for the movie were filmed inside Windham Town Hall's old courtroom on the third floor.

The film also had scenes shot in Hartford. Starr plays the lead character - Diamond Ruff.

"Orphan, con artist, crime boss, millionaire, Diamond Ruff has seen it all. Seemingly in control, his next big job has deadly consequences," according to the film's web site.

"Diamond Ruff " is produced by Hartford-based film company Young Studios and is anticipating a 2012 theatrical release.

It also stars Dennis L.A. White, Felicia Pearson, Famecia Ward and Shanette Wilson.

"He's a fly guy," Starr said of his character during a break in filming Wednesday.

"He's a thinker," he added, while noting Diamond Ruff - the character - "is about his money."

Starr said he could see a little bit of himself in his character.

"You have to have some connection in some way," Starr said.

Starr said his character reminded him of someone he knew in Queens.

" He was a thug, but he was a thinker," he said.

Starr said he had read the book and became interested in the role.

"It's a movie of triumph," he said, adding something inside audiences will have them rooting for his character.

"This is one where you want to root for the bad guy," he said.

Starr, the Jamaica-Queens native, is also known from the hardcore rap group Onyx, whose breakthrough hit in the early 1990s was "Slam."

He said he's still touring and Onyx is the top American International rap group.

Starr also talked about Willimantic, which he hadn't been to previously. "It's a beautiful city," he said, adding Willimantic gives people that "Connecticut feel."

Young, who wrote the book, said the story is about good-versus-evil and teaches that if a person makes a mistake, there's another chance in life.

He said it also has audiences think about whom they surround themselves with or the company one keeps.

Young said the film also shows the destruction of anger. "It's 'Pulp Fiction' meets 'The Wire,'" he said.

Film officials chose the courtroom because of laws preventing current courtrooms from being used in films.

"It's a diamond in the rough," said Young, on why Willimantic was chosen to film.

"It has that authentic look," said film spokesman NiiDjan Cue Lomotey.

Young also appreciated the town's openness.

"The people have been very friendly," Young said. "They have been good partners."

Meanwhile, the town was more than happy to host the crew.

"I think it's great," said Windham Town Manager Neal Beets, adding movie crews are typically large and use local eateries, bars and hardware stores while in town.

Beets called it a "win, win, win" - a goodplace for film crews to film, some revenue for the town for leasing the space and a boon for local businesses.

"You know we're becoming Willi-Wood," Beets said, an allusion to Hollywood - the movie capital of the world.

Beets said film crews have chosen the Thread City because it has a lot to offer, including an urban setting, campus life (Eastern Connecticut State University) and historic buildings.

Plus, the town works with film crews to assist them, he said.

He added the historic architecture the town features "make for good cinema."

Beets said the town's historic courtroom features a setting people envision in their mind when they think of courtrooms.

"This one looks big and rich," he said, invoking courtroom images from movies such as "The Verdict" with Paul Newman, the original "12 Angry Men" or "A Few Good Men."

Beets also said the movie has generated a little "buzz" around town hal from curious residents who wondered what was going on upstairs in town hall.

Even with the large film crew, town hall business was conducted without interruption.

"Yeah, amazingly so," Beets said, on how quiet the film crew is.

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