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IT'S A WRAP FOR "DIAMOND RUFF"

Diamond Ruff actor Fredro Starr and movie fan "King" Roy Russell. Photo Johnny Mason

Diamond Ruff locations manager Denise Hannon-Gross and Director Alec Asten. Photo Johnny Mason

By Johnny Mason
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Hartford - So this is a Hollywood Starr? Doing pushups stretched across two circular cafeteria tables in a movie set back room, actor Fredro Starr prepared for his lead role in the Hartford-shot, independent film, "Diamond Ruff."

Filmmakers recently shot at Cheshire's former Webster Correctional Center – a prison scene, of course – where Starr, who plays the Hartford con man, took a break to offer his views on a character many described as "creative and intelligent."

"He goes through a lot, but in the end there's redemption," said Starr, who has appeared on shows such as the "The Wire" and 'CSI: NY and is a founding member of the '90s rap group, Onyx. "He's a rock. He's fresh."

The three-week shoot began Sept. 6th and was shot mostly in Hartford and other locations across the state. Billed as a PG-13 morality tale, the Screen Actors Guild production is based on a novel by Joe Young Jr., a Hartford-born cartoonist, animator and president of Young Studios in Hartford.

The cast also features Dennis L.A. White, who appeared in "Notorious" and "The Brave One," Michael Colyar of "The Princess and the Frog," fame and Felicia "Snoop" Pearson, who also appeared in "The Wire."

On the recent morning movie shoot, purposeful-looking people in headsets ran around setting up the lights, cameras and sound equipment for the prison scene.

"To make a movie you need time and money," said Young's son, Kyle, 25, who in addition to serving as one of the movie's producers, had the job of transporting film footage from the set to the editing studio.

"And you have to be creative because there's a limited amount of both."

On the set, director Alec Asten watched the action on a video monitor as White rehearsed his lines as a preacher. Asten paused during the dialogue to praise city and state film officials for their support in enabling filming to run smoothly and finish under its $200,000 budget.

"Everyone's been fantastic," said Asten, who grew up in Mystic and lives in Rhode Island. "They've been so supportive, especially when it comes to providing locations."

While one room had a morass of lights and cameras and shouting crew members, the building's lobby served as a dressing room where extras playing the roles of inmates slipped into prison garb.

Looking every bit like a hardened criminal, 6-foot, 330-pound, goateed Paul Braccioforte, a Wallingford warehouse worker, explained his strategy for playing an inmate and the history behind his bulging tattoo-covered arms.

"There's a whole lot of stories there," said Braccioforte, who added the director's instruction to play a "bad guy" had him repeatedly scowling and clenching his fists during his scene.

The shoot attracted a few movie fans to the set, including Roy Russell, 52, of Hartford, who went to high school with Joe Young Jr. Russell, who goes by the stage name "King" Roy, said he was inspired by Young's determination to see his novel made into a movie and by Starr for overcoming a tough Queens, NY, neighborhood to make it in show business.

"I give Joe a lot of credit. He knows what he wants," said Russell, who after a day on the set vowed to pursue his lifelong goal to become an actor. "He's following his dream."