

Desert Sun

Estimated printed pages: 3

August 6, 2007

Section: DESERT TODAY

Page: D1

Every week is Fleet Week with 'Adopt a Sailor'

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The Desert Sun

Would you be willing to open your home to a young Marine in town for the night? That's the basic premise of a film in production by Coachella Valley resident, Kim Waltrip and her WonderStar Productions company.

The film is from a screenplay by University of California, Riverside, playwright, Charles Evered, who also is making his directing debut with the indie flick. The wonder of it really is the speed at which the film has come together.

"This is more like 'guerrilla' filmmaking," Waltrip said from her Palm Desert production office.

While she won't divulge the indie film's budget, she does say, "It's less than Spiderman."

It's who you know

It was a call from screenwriter/playwright Evered to Waltrip in January that got "Adopt A Sailor" rolling.

"He called and said he had script," she says. "And asked if I wanted to read it."

Once she dug into the script, Waltrip knew she wanted to produce it.

With scenes set during New York's Fleet Week (in late May), There was less than two months to pull everything together.

She was about to fund the film herself when an investor in other projects called. "He asked 'how much' and said he'd fund the whole thing," she says.

The Navy helped out by sending a helicopter to ferry the cast and crew 25 miles out to sea for three days shooting aboard the U.S.S. Wasp, Waltrip says.

Leading man Ethan Peck insisted on blending in with the ship's crew. "He didn't want us to tell anybody who he was," she says.

Even New York City co-operated. "We didn't have to pay one dime for permits and they were really helpful," Waltrip says.

Star power

Bebe Neuwirth and Peter Coyote head up the cast of "Adopt A Sailor." "Everybody knows Bebe from 'Cheers' but she's done so much more," Waltrip says.

Neuwirth was familiar with the original play from performing a 10-minute version as part of the 2002 Brave New World showcase to commemorate the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

Then there's the role of Bebe's husband in the film. Casting sessions were held in Los Angeles, the desert and New York. "They were hysterical," Waltrip recalls.

Neuwirth asked, "Does anybody love Peter Coyote?" Neuwirth forwarded him the script, he had time in his schedule and said yes.

As for the lead, "Once Ethan opened his mouth, we knew he had the part," she says.

Selling his words

"Adopt A Sailor" isn't Evered's first script.

The East Rutherford, N.J., native has writing degrees from Rutgers University and Yale, where he was mentored by writer/director George Roy Hill. "When I graduated, (Hill) asked me what I intended to do with my life," he says.

Evered's writing earned him the Amblin'/Chesterfield Award, from Steven Spielberg's Amblin' Entertainment Co., that brought him out to Hollywood to write scripts. "I was earning a pretty good living," he says.

Dissatisfaction eventually set in, "I wasn't a writer, I was highly paid stenographer," he says of his decision to chuck the job, take his savings and travel.

Back in Hollywood he sold a script called "Carrier" to DreamWorks. As part of his research, Evered ended up at the naval bases in San Diego. "Here I was a professional writer making \$150,000 a year talking to kids making \$13,500 and it made me sick," he recalls. "I felt like a dilettante."

That is until he joined the Naval Officer Reserve Corps. "I found much more diversity in the Navy than I ever did in academia or Hollywood," he says.

He brought the script for "Adopt A Sailor" to Waltrip because he wanted to direct and "If it went to a major studio I never would have had the chance," he says.

"I chose to align myself with a production company that has the same philosophy and wouldn't question my ability to direct (the film)."

Glance: A movie is born

What: Adopt A Sailor

When: Due to hit the film festival circuit in 2008 before general release later that year

Writer/Director: Charles Evered

Starring: Bebe Neuwirth, Peter Coyote, Ethan Peck

Producers: WonderStar Production

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