



FLORIDA FILM MONTHLY

AN AFTERNOON WITH
KEVIN SMITH

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COMES TO FLORIDA!**

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NEXT GENERATION SHORT FILM CONTEST
BEHIND THE INDIE CAMERA



STILL GREEN



Talented filmmakers use Florida to help them reach the next level. By John Hogan



The cast on set of the independent feature film *Still Green* shot here in Florida.

In 2004, *Freedom Park*, an indie-family comedy directed by Jon Artigo, was doing exceptionally well in north eastern film festivals, garnering the production team fantastic publicity, news coverage, and becoming a local hit among the art house theaters. The low-budget film that utilized unknown actors and a hard working local crew achieved a great deal of success in a limited run.

The film became a smash hit within the festival circuit, winning the "Independent Spirit Award" at the World Cinema Naples film festival, as well as an award from the Marco Island film festival here in Florida. In fact, it was at the film festival in Marco Island where the filmmakers got inspiration for their next project. "Initially we were going to film our next movie in South Carolina," says Producer Georgia Menides. "But after being here for a couple of weeks, we realized that Florida would be a better canvas for

our next project."

That next project would turn out to be *Still Green*. *Still Green*, which was written by Menides, depicts the last summer vacation of a bunch of graduates who rent a beach house together before setting off for college. Things take a dark turn when one of the friends tragically drowns in the ocean. The death becomes the ultimate test of friendship amongst the teens as many confront their inner demons. "The movie has such a dark tone in it, and we loved the contrast of filming it in such a vibrant environment," says Artigo who would step into the director's chair once again.

Originally, the budget for *Still Green* was a rather pedestrian \$55,000. After the success of *Freedom Park*, though, the team wanted to try and take *Still Green* to the next level. "We wanted to see what we could do with a larger budget," says Artigo. "We wanted to push ourselves and have that pressure that comes along

with having multiple investors eagerly waiting on a good product."

With a new objective in place, the team exhausted every resource, including using several connections they made here in Florida while doing the festival secret. While at Marco Island, they met actor Doug Spain whose resume goes as far to include a role in *Band of Brothers*. Spain was so impressed with the passion of the directors and producers that turning down a role was not an option in his mind. With his attachment, more money came in allowing for the casting of two other Hollywood actors.

Another man who became a great contributor was Bill Schulte. "He was instrumental in helping us make the movie," says Menides. "He let us use his boat which was needed for the water shots, and he used his pull in the community to get us product donations, free locations and press." The press led to another opportunity that seemed almost too good to be true.

STILL GREEN (CONT'D)



An article in the local paper led an independently wealthy businessman straight to their set. Businessman Douglass Peterson happened to live just down the street from where the filming was taking place, and after reading the article, he went down to look at the filmmaking process. He was welcomed by the directors and producers to stay and watch, which he did, seeing for himself that these people went above and beyond in their work ethic and positive attitude. Peterson, sensing that the whole bunch needed a break, decided he would treat all them to dinner. The team as well as cast and crew enjoyed the food and good time, but were at complete shock of what Peterson offered as desert- additional funds for their film.

To Peterson, it was about more than the glitz and glamour of the film business or the executive producer title he was given. "I just like to help people who are very dedicated and hardworking, they deserve it," says Peterson. "It is rare that you see that from one person nowadays, but they had an entire crew of people with that drive." With the money Peterson contributed, along with investments from several other people in Florida, *Still Green* had a budget of \$250,000 to work with.

Additional assistance would come from film commissioner Maggie McCarty, who would guide the team through those necessary legal loops involved in filmmaking. Florida does not offer any tax incentives to films with a budget of less than 850,000 dollars, but McCarty was able to secure vital location permits that cost the producers much less than anticipated, as well as obtaining the audition space for the films talent. "Mrs. McCarty was great. She went out of her way for a little independent film, which she didn't need to do," says Menides. "That's what needs to happen for these films to be successful and we got a lot of it on this project from great people all around the state of Florida."

All of the crew, and the majority of the talent was from the state of Florida. Although many of them worked for free, the cast was more than exceptional in their attitudes and keeping up with incredible pace at which the movie was filmed. Even though it was tough at some points, members of the cast have nothing but the highest respect and opinions about their director and producers. Local actor Paul Costa says about his director and producers, "These people never slept, and yet every morning they were ready to go with a fresh surprising new attitude." Brandon Meyer also remembers the experience of shooting his first feature. "It was an amazing experience. I made a lot of great friends in the process as well and I got to see the process of a feature film being made. I never knew how much hard work and preparation goes into making a movie."

As observed by everyone who met them, this team has become known for their tireless work ethic and "never quit no matter what" personas. With the larger budget they were able to hire more crew members as well as a professional Cinematographer, but Producer Andrea Ajemian remembers all the other jobs they were doing in addition to producing duties.

Imagine running on less than four hours of sleep, then having to make sure everyone is fed, manage the schedule, manage the sets, helping in cos-

"Was it hard? Of course. But it was all worth it."

tuming, acting as the first A.D as well as trying to make sure the film stays within its budget. But all that was done with smiles on their faces, Ajemian says, "If at any time you get a chance to stop to think about all your doing, it feels great. Was it hard? Of course but it was all worth it! A fantastic experience."

The greatest obstacle of making this film ended up becoming Mother

Nature herself. Filming took place during the summer, and Floridians are only too familiar with how brutal the summers can be. Artigo laughs at the memory of the cast crew and himself working in sweat drenched clothes, "I'd instantly make another film in Florida" laughs Artigo "but never ever again during the summer." The movie couldn't catch a break as the much loved hurricane season commenced, causing a few days to be rained out.

The team also had to work around a few location changes due to the hatching of baby turtles on a nearby beach. So producers had to put up pa-

"I'd instantly make another film in Florida...but never in the summer!"

tiently with the most dedicated group of activists known to man, the environmentalists, who insisted that production be halted or moved to a new location. In the end everything worked itself out, and Ajemian wanted to stress that no baby turtles were harmed during the making of the film. Despite delays and hardships, the team breathed a sigh of relief as they wrapped on schedule. The filming of *Still Green* was finished.

The film has since been through the post production stage and has been submitted to the Sundance film festival. Menides and the other producers are extremely confident in how they feel *Green* will do, as she looks over offers from potential buyers. So with this film in the bag, the entire team has already moved on to their next projects, which keep snowballing as they go on.

Artigo wanted to leave readers with advice that he felt has benefited him the most, he stresses, "In this business you cannot wait for things to happen, you need to make your own opportunities, always. And pick who you work with very carefully, and once you find them keep them with you; you'll accomplish a lot that way." And he can back that up with his own experience from *Still Green*, a small group of people who accomplished where most fail, all due to their persistent hard work, and perseverance.

[For more information on *Still Green* visit www.stillgreenmovie.com]

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