

Hollywood's in town

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A gravitational pull draws Adrian Livermore back each day to a Northeast Portland movie set.

In trying to become one of 500 extras for a prom scene to be filmed this week at nearby Grant High School, the 16-year-old strikes up a conversation with a crew member responsible for finding local help.

"I'm one of those crazy people who will watch the extended version again and again," Livermore said of DVDs. "This is great for me because I actually get to see all of the behind-the-scenes stuff happening."

Livermore is one of many residents in Northeast Portland who no doubt have noticed the trailer trucks, winding cables and rain machines that have taken over the intersection at Northeast Knott Street and 23rd Avenue for production of a \$1 million independent film called "Nearing Grace."

Film crews moved into the neighborhood last week to start shooting at a rented house on tree-lined 23rd Avenue. They will film in Oregon until the end of the month before wrapping up filming in New Jersey.

Producer Susan Johnson said the Irvington neighborhood was ideal because the houses closely resemble the older homes that could have been found in 1979 in South Orange, N.J., where the movie is set. Johnson said she was familiar with the area because she filmed another Whitewater Films production here last year titled "Mean Creek."

Another deciding factor was state legislation passed last year that created an incentive program that will reimburse Whitewater Films \$100,000, Johnson said. It's part of a statewide effort to attract film companies to Oregon. This is the sixth feature film shot in the state this year, according to the governor's office.

"Nearing Grace" is about an eccentric teenager dealing with life after his mother's death. The movie is based on the novel by Scott Sommer, and stars Gregory Smith, David Morse, Jordana Brewster and Ashley Johnson.

Crew member Rachel Lipsey, who is responsible for providing snacks and drinks on set, said she's noticed area residents of a certain demographic hanging out around the set.

"Anyone under 15 and female is out," she said.

Johnson said the reason for the younger, female crowd could be they are there to see 21-year-old Smith, who is on the WB network show "Everwood."

That's the reason Kendall Kowitz, 15, has been spending time at the set.

On Sunday, Kowitz visited the set along with her sisters and friends to catch a glimpse of the actor and get an autograph. She also signed up to be an extra in the prom scene. Her eyes grew big when she was told the girls would be given prom dresses to wear.

But when she ran to tell her father, he didn't share her enthusiasm.

"Whatever," he said.

Still, others such as Livermore see the magnitude of the movie.

"It's big and grand, and you just don't get that in Portland, and when it happens, you'll just stop and watch," he said.

Robert Platt, a crew member and Portland resident, was keeping cars from parking too close to the production. He said he enjoyed working with the local crew and welcomed the chance for another job opportunity. Since April, he has worked on four movie sets in Oregon.

"It could turn into a profitable year," Platt said. "It was abysmal last year. It was pretty much starvation."

The 55-member crew is mostly Oregonians, with a quarter of the workers coming from Los Angeles, Johnson said.

Pat Gerrard, who lives next door to the house where the crew is filming, said she enjoys watching the action from her windows. She is allowing the crew to install high-powered lights in her living room at night, to give more light to the set.

The experience has taught her how much work goes into making a movie.

"So now I know why the credits seem to run on forever," she said.

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