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Wrestling with Delaware

Local filmmaker aims for fame in a suburban coming-of-age story

by Lori Zaspel

Aside from a brief putdown in the movie *Wayne's World*, mainstream cinema has paid little or no attention to Delaware. A. I. DuPont graduate and local filmmaker Jeremy O'Keefe aims to change that.

In wrestling, his self-described "coming-of-age" film, writer-producer-director O'Keefe seeks to portray familiar suburban characters, but "in a three-dimensional way" and with a definite Wilmington flavor. The actors have even mastered the subtle Northern Delaware accent on words such as "phohne" and "hohme." O'Keefe also plans to make the suburbs of Wilmington a character in the film, while showcasing the unique beauty of the city.

The film celebrates what he calls the "air of invincibility" that teenagers possess. "There is a time and place for invincibility," he says, "but what matters is how you deal when things don't go your way."

wrestling focuses on Jake, an upper-middle-class teenager who, like many teens, assumes he is untouchable until tragedy strikes. While attempting to deal with his mother's death, he forms a desperate, magnetic relationship with a girl who has also suffered a loss. Their attraction springs from a mutual desperation over their inability to control such life-changing events.

O'Keefe says the film "is geared for people who have been through high school, not high schoolers specifically." He believes the story's nostalgic feel will help everyone who sees the film relate to the characters and their problems. He wants viewers to "own up to having been young."

In keeping with the Wilmington theme, other local artisans and creative people are involved in the filmmaking process, including

local actors, designers, photographers, and aestheticians. The sound track features the Day Action band, whose members include O'Keefe's brothers Matt and Nate, and, at times, Doug Buchacek and Denny Hehman. The film derives its name from their song, "Wrestling." It describes a man's complex feelings about a woman, and can be found on the band's Website (www.dayactionband.com).

Jeremy O'Keefe says that the song, combined with his personal experiences, led him to begin writing wrestling three years ago. Since then, the editing and revising process has enabled him to gain distance from the experiences reflected in the story. He says the process has been therapeutic, enabling him to better understand those experiences.

Casting for the movie was completed in mid-June with the aid of Philadelphia casting director Barabara Hedges-Hoffman, who was the dean of Wilmington's Cab Calloway School of the Arts when O'Keefe attended. Shooting begins on Aug. 8, and the film is expected to be released in the winter or spring of 2005.