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Espanola High School teacher, a Township of Sables-Spanish Rivers councillor will be starring in Black Forest



Photos of scenes from the independent movie 'Black Forest' filmed in Algoma Mills and surrounding areas; where Jayson Stewart, local teacher and councillor plays the role of the antagonist. All photos supplied.

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Distant Field Productions, an independent film company, headed to the North Shore on Aug. 12 to begin filming scenes for their latest independent film, *Black Forest*. Jayson Stewart, a teacher at Espanola High School, a Township of Sables-Spanish Rivers councillor and producer of Spartan Youth Radio – an extra-curricular club at Espanola High School, will be starring in *Black Forest* as Isaac, the antagonist.

Stewart has many years of experience in theatre such as being an actor, director, producer, backstage crew, sound engineer and promoter. He has played numerous background characters in film, specializes in voice acting (and can do an incredible Sean Connery impersonation that would make one think the legendary actor was on set) and does whatever he can to promote the Sables-Spanish Rivers area to the film community. He's been working closely with director David Briggs in finding the perfect locations to film *Black Forest*.

Stewart got a taste for acting in Grade 8 when he a friend dared him to try out for a role in a school production of *Scrooge*, A Christmas Carol. He won the role of Jacob Marley.

"I realized that the adrenalin of acting, the addictive thrill of letting a completely different character take over, of immersing myself into the life of someone else was something I enjoyed," Stewart explained, when asked what got him into acting.

In 2010, Stewart brought some students to the set of *Phase One*, a medical horror thriller that filmed in Sudbury. "I was thrilled to witness how a movie was made. I brought students to Markstay for the filming of *A Little Bit Zombie* and then, last fall, brought an entire bus load of kids to appear as extras in *The Lesser Blessed*."

The first film Stewart appeared in was *The Truth*, starring Andy Garcia, Eva Longoria, Devon Bostick, Kevin Durand and Forest Whitaker in which Stewart played a cameraman in a pivotal scene with Bostick.

In another scene with Garcia and Durand, he can only be seen as a fuzzy 'blob' in the background. "It's cool to say 'I did a scene with Andy Garcia' even if I was just in the background," Stewart said with a grin. *The Truth* has not been released yet. Stewart also played a teacher in *Lesser Blessed*.

So what about his character in *Black Forest*? His

character Isaac is his first starring role in a film. Isaac and his partner in crime, Clay, are the antagonists and extremely creepy. At first Isaac is helpful and kind, but then leads the two young stars of the film into the depths of terror within the haunting realm of the *Black Forest*. He has lived in the back woods for most of his life with one foot in the real world where he's creepy and odd, but not dangerous; yet in his own backward world he is a violent man with 'oddball' conspiracy theories and has plans to build a better world. So what are Stewart's movie plans for the future?

"Though I've crossed 'be in a movie' off my (bucket) list, I have the bug and will be pursuing other roles. I will never quit teaching, but will certainly be involved in other

productions.

"As a municipal councillor, I will continue working to promote this area for film locations. Director David Briggs was most impressed with the variety of scenes he could do in Sables-Spanish Rivers and I'm hoping to use his film as bait to draw in other productions. As an actor, it's certainly an exciting time to live in Northern Ontario."

Nicholas Piche, of Espanola, was a last minute replacement actor. A former student of Stewart's, he quickly agreed to join the cast when the actor playing forest ranger Dale McQueen dropped out. Piche was in the middle of working on his acting resume when he received the call that he not only had his first movie gig, but that it also had lines and a murder scene.

He stayed with the team for the entire 24-hour marathon shoot filmed in Algoma Mills and helped as a lighting technician, sound operator and prop master.

The Chutes Provincial Park was the first stop for the North Shore filming. Cinematographer, Torin Laugen, filmed parts of the opening scenes with stars, Marie-Josée (MJ) Dionne who plays Bree, and France Ithart who plays Jess (character name not official yet). Due to a few minor bumps in casting, the script had to be changed. Instead of featuring a couple camping, now it will be two best friends. The interaction between the two young women is flawless.

Many of the scenes filmed locally were small, but will ultimately set the mood of the movie. From the Chutes the team travelled to the bridge coming into Massey on Highway 17 and then to Ellen's Place for another small, but crucial scene between the two actresses. While the scene was small it took quite some time to film. As an independent company, Distant Film Production works



with one camera and most scenes are not done in one shot. In fact, it can take many shots, from many angles and sometimes, many hours. And much debate between the cinematographer and the director. Some scenes were shot 'on the fly' with no set script. But when a potential opportunity presents itself the camera is pulled out and anything can be used as a tool to get just the right shot, for example using a minivan with its side door open as a dolly. After wrapping up at Ellen's Place the team moved on the Elliot Lake and then Algoma Mills to film more scenes.



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