

the cameras more affordable. The group has secured about \$55,000 of the budget, but is still welcoming donations.

FAMILIAR TERRITORY

D'Oench says it was important for the group to be in Petoskey well ahead of filming. "We wanted to familiarize ourselves with the environment we'd be entrenched in over the couple weeks," he says.

Rettstadt says the Michigan Film Office has been helpful from the start, suggesting rental facilities, and putting out a statewide casting call. Rettstadt says volunteers came from as far away as Kalamazoo.

Local actor and choreographer Tracy Thomson, who has toured with The Young Americans, is a featured dancer in the film. "It's amazing to see how much work, rehearsal, commitment, and patience goes into putting a film together. Getting a chance to work with such talented artists is really an honor," he says.

Meg Kehoe of Petoskey is serving as script supervisor on the project. "This mostly implies continuity," she says. "Continuity from day to day on our shoot is especially important," she adds. "The script only covers the characters adventures throughout a single day."

Therefore, Kehoe needed to make sure that each time filming resumed, the hair, makeup, costumes, cameras, etc. were all precisely as they had been previously. "A lot of the job is all about heavy attention to detail," she said.

Andrew Gullidge, a Petoskey High School senior who has regularly been involved in managing the sound for school productions, volunteered as a production assistant. His duties included keeping the set free of passersby and "fire-watching," or keeping an eye on the expensive gear while the crew was on break. "I wanted to learn about the process, because that's kind of what I'm looking at for college," he says.

Gullidge was amazed by the time and energy that go into every shot, no matter the amount of time the shot might take up on screen. "One shot could take three hours and you only get ten seconds of footage," he says of the process. "I appreciate the process more now."

Rettstadt agrees, acknowledging, "Whenever you see a movie, everything on the screen has been perfectly planned."

TRIPLE THREAT

The story stars high school seniors Blake Johnson and Dakota Lamont. Jake Mendes of Colorado and Jaclyn Ingoglia of New Jersey fill the lead roles. "The story is about their relationship and how the tournament affects that relationship," the director says.

When casting a musical, Rettstadt says, "You have to find a triple threat," meaning an actor who can also sing and dance.

"Basis of Decision," which wrapped filming in Petoskey in March, has been in production for many months. Auditions began in November, with casting done in February.

Rettstadt says he had two major goals when he began the project, including shooting on 35 mm film, and recording the music with a full orchestra. The NYU Orchestra, a full 54 instruments large, recorded the score.

Hoping to screen the film in Petoskey next fall, Rettstadt also has bigger plans. "We'd love for it to be at the Traverse City Film Festival; that's a goal."



Director Erich Rettstadt and script supervisor Meg Kehoe study the action on a shot in downtown Petoskey this winter. Photo by Glen Young.

MUSIC TO THEIR EARS

Filmmakers shoot a musical in hometown Petoskey

By Glen Young

If his project works out as he hopes, Erich Rettstadt of Petoskey will return to the Traverse City Film Festival at some future date. The return trip will not be to reprise his role as an intern, but rather to attend the screening of his just completed film "Basis of Decision."

Rettstadt describes the film as a "1950s style musical." Set in fictional Harbor Village, somewhere in an undisclosed idyllic

Midwestern burg, the film recently wrapped filming in and around Petoskey.

"I don't want it to be site specific," Rettstadt says of using a fictitious location name. "I want it to have a very Americana feel." Though the setting is contemporary, the feel is clearly 1950s, with vintage cars and classic clothing, and throwback singing and dancing.

A 2007 graduate of Petoskey High School and currently a senior at New York University, Rettstadt returned in late March to scout locations and make final preparations. With his key contributors in tow, Rettstadt visited his old high school as well as the public library, the waterfront area, and the community's famed Gaslight shopping district. Several blocks of Petoskey's Lake Street were blocked to traffic for filming for an entire day.

"I knew I wanted to shoot my senior thesis film here," Rettstadt

says of his decision to shoot in Petoskey. "I also knew I wanted to make a musical."

GREAT DEBATE

The story, based on a script idea Rettstadt drafted while a sophomore at NYU, follows the relationship of two high school debaters as they make their way to the state tournament finals. Rettstadt was an accomplished debater in high school. The 10 days of shooting, and months of preparation, will ultimately be edited down to approximately 25 minutes of film.

"I knew I wanted to do something about high school debate," the director says about the film's focus. In addition to the script, Rettstadt collaborated on the song lyrics, while an outside composer developed the music.

First assistant director Robin D'Oench, production designer Emma Berliner, and cinematographer Mingjue Hu serve as the film's brain trust. D'Oench and Berliner are also NYU seniors, while Hu graduated last year.

With a cast of 20-25, Rettstadt says some of the filming and recording was completed in New York before the group arrived in Northern Michigan. The team is shooting the film on 35-millimeter film, using Panavision cameras. D'Oench says this combination is the industry standard, and will give the finished product a more professional quality. With a budget of more than \$60,000, Rettstadt says he has secured a grant from Panavision to make the rental of



A 1950s style musical provide material for the film, "Basis of Decision."