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> [News](#) > [Local News](#)

[«--back to story](#)

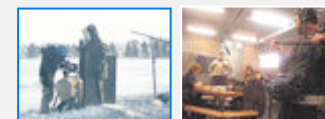
It's a wrap

Filmmakers complete movie with substantial local help

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Article Photos



Submitted Photos

The crew of "Prairie Love" shields the camera from the wind for shooting a scene south of Minot. From left to right are Ari Davidson, assistant camera; Holy Ellis, actress and producer; and Dusty Bias, writer and director.

Filming for an independent movie in the Minot area is complete, and while the three filmmakers, who are all Minot High School grads, are glad that difficult job is complete, all agree it was a wonderful experience they won't soon forget.

The film, "Prairie Love," is a dark comedy about a nomad travelling the rural roads of North Dakota who saves the life of a stranded man. When the nomad discovers the man is travelling to meet a pen-pal girlfriend he has never met, the nomad assumes his identity in hopes of having a relationship with her.

Holly Ellis, an actor who is now back in New York, is the film's production manager and also plays the character of the pen-pal girlfriend. She said they were constantly on the move during filming and barely had a moment's rest.

"It's the hardest set I've ever worked for a very concentrated period of time. Once the ball started rolling ... we never stopped," Ellis said. "It was just late nights, followed by late nights, followed by early mornings, and over and over again."

Doug Mueller agreed. A producer and production designer on the film, Mueller is back in Carmel Valley, Calif., enjoying the warm weather and some relaxation after the brutal shooting schedule in subzero temperatures.

"On a rare occasion we would do less than 12 hours (per day), and only because we ran out of daylight," Mueller said.

The writer and director of "Prairie Love," Dusty Bias, is back in Alabama to edit the film.

Shooting started on Jan. 3 and didn't wrap up until the morning of Jan. 27, four days after it was originally scheduled to end. They filmed on 23 of those days and the last of their two days off during that stretch was Jan. 16.

Ellis said the bad weather was constantly causing problems, such as breaking equipment - the old station wagon used in the film must have broken down around 100 times - and making conditions difficult to film in - standing in the middle of a barren field with no protection from the wind is not fun. Ellis is glad to be done filming because she's not killing herself trying to get a thousand different things done at once, but she does miss the camaraderie of the team.

She said they would constantly say they were "making movies" by reminding each other of the glamour, action, adventure, beautiful women and stunning locations their job entailed.

"We were saying that to ourselves and we were sweeping up bird poop in Lignite," Ellis said.

Mueller said all the problems did give them a chance to pick up some skills they might otherwise not have the time or patience to learn. He said being able to start unreliable cars and dressing warmly enough to survive bitterly cold temperatures are just a few of the things he learned a great deal about, and he also noted that he packed up more trailers during that one month of filming than he has in the rest of his life.

"The best part about making movies is all the things you learn that have nothing to do with making movies," Mueller said. "It's fun to learn all these things that you never cared to learn about."

While the cast and crew put in day after day of hard work to get the film done, they agree it could not have happened without the help of a multitude of local people and businesses. A number of restaurants in Minot and several other communities donated meals, while filming locations and the use of several vehicles were also offered for free.

"They just went way beyond what you could hope for and saved us time and time again," Mueller said. "It was a really big community effort."

"And then just on top of that, our moms gave us office space, a place to stay, home cooked meals," Ellis said. "We literally could not have survived without all these people checking in on us. We were all completely overwhelmed (by the support)."

Although there were many hardships they had to endure while making the film, Ellis said being able to come back to her hometown to shoot a movie was a wonderful experience she'll always cherish.

"I can't tell you how much I miss the town of Minot. I miss the town, I miss the smiling faces. It was really special to make a movie in my hometown," Ellis said.

"It was awesome. We got to do so many cool things like speaking to Minot State about shooting movies, (and) Magic City and Central Campus."

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