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### 'Prairie Love'

Finding love on the North Dakota prairie

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POSTED: December 16, 2008

#### Article Photos



Dan Feldner/MDN

From left to right, Douglas Mueller, Bryant Mock, Dusty Bias and Holly Ellis stand in front of a station wagon that will be using as a prop in the movie "Prairie Love." The movie is about the search for companionship on the cold, North Dakota prairie.

A group of filmmakers originally from Minot have come back home to film a movie about the attempt to find love and companionship on the cold, unforgiving prairie of North Dakota.

The writer and director of "Prairie Love" and 1997 graduate of Minot High School, Dusty Bias, said it's a dark comedy about a nomad who travels the rural roads of North Dakota, living off the land alone in his station wagon. When the nomad saves a stranded man, he also learns of the man's purpose, which is to pick up his pen pal girlfriend from a women's correctional facility.

"A pen pal girlfriend that he's never seen or met, it's just been a pen pal relationship. He (the nomad) steals his identity in hopes of having a relationship with her," Bias said. "In simple terms it's three characters really searching for love and finding it in an odd way."

Fellow Minot High grads Douglas Mueller and Holly Ellis are helping Bias bring his vision to life. Mueller and Bias have done multiple filmmaking projects together, and a film of theirs, "Four Corners," recently won second place at the Seattle Sci-Fi Festival. For this film, Mueller, who lives in California, is a producer and production designer, just to name a few of his responsibilities. Ellis, an actor out of New York, is the production manager and plays the character of the pen pal girl.

"We all sort of have to wear multiple hats because of the budget," said Bias, who lives in Alabama.

Like many films, "Prairie Love" is on a tight schedule. The month of December is being used for preproduction, while filming will begin Jan. 3 and last 18 days. Shooting will take place six days a week, with 12 hour days. Bias said they're going to do everything in their power to limit their days to 12 hours, but he noted they sometimes have to go over that to stay on schedule.

"We're quitters if we shoot for less than 12 hours," Bias said.

"We're quitters and we won't finish," Ellis added to laughs around the room.

After filming is complete, Bias will head back to Alabama and take the next six months to edit the film, which will last from 70 to 90 minutes. He figures to have the film completed around September of next year, and will then take the next year to shop the film around to distributors and film festivals.

While there is still much to do, Bias does have a goal for the film in mind that he is shooting for.

"Ultimately, being able to play at Sundance Film Festival would be a big deal," Bias said. "There's definitely other film festivals that are equally as important, and we could benefit from just as much, probably, as Sundance. But everyone knows it and it's still an ultimate goal for an independent film to have its premier at that film festival."

While the filmmakers are bringing in some of their own cast and crew, they still need local help to pull this project off. Auditions for several parts are being held Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Mouse River Players Theater. Parts available include a female motel clerk in her late 50s or older, the motel clerk's husband, also in his late 50s or older, a male police officer and a female prison guard.

The motel clerk and police officer are speaking roles, while the motel clerk's husband and prison guard are non-speaking roles.

Anyone interested in auditioning for one of the roles is asked to contact Ellis by e-mail at [hollylynnellis@gmail.com](mailto:hollylynnellis@gmail.com) before showing up for auditions.

Rounding out the cast isn't the only help Bias and his fellow filmmakers will be getting from the community to make this project work. While many of the locations used in the film will be extremely rural, there are a few urban settings that required local help to secure.

A motel in Mohall is set to be one the locations. In Minot, Bias said a little movie magic will be used to transform Maysa Arena into a corrections facility.

"It really has this 70s', early-80s' feel, where we're avoiding this city-life aspect of the Dakotas," Bias said.

They have already made significant progress during preproduction, but there is much that remains to be done. Props they still need include a 1970s- or 1980s-era police cruiser as well as an unmarked tow truck.

And an important location they still need is an old farm house that is clean and fully furnished, but looks as if it hasn't been lived in for some time. They would only need to use the interior of the house for filming purposes, so it could be located anywhere in or around Minot.

"If my grandmother had a farmstead and passed away in 1980, and the place had been cleaned and we just never touched it again for 20 years, never moved any furniture, that was it, we just left it," Bias said. "I mean that's sort of what we're looking for. So it's still furnished, full of 60s'-, 70s'-looking furniture."

Anyone who would be able to help Bias out with a needed prop or location can contact Ellis at her e-mail address.

Bias said there is no way they could possibly make this film without the unwavering support of the community because their budget is so small. Two crew members will be staying with Bias and his grandmother, while another two crew members will be with Ellis and her mother. They are also able to use some free office space at Art Relief in Burlington thanks to Donna Watts.

"So if we flew in experienced crew members and had to put them in hotels and pay for that, I mean we just don't have the money to do that," Bias said.

And it's not just family members who are helping out. While Bias, Mueller and Ellis plan on making some movie magic, they are quickly finding out that Minot has some magic of its own.

"I mean being able to walk up to the Maysa Arena and have Chuck Emery, the manager there, go, 'No problem, (Maysa) is free, you can use it and I'll work with your schedule, just let me know ahead of time.' I mean, if you're in another city, that's not going to happen, you know?" Bias said.

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