

The Forum Article

Lights, Camera, Shreveport: Jeffrey Goodman hopes to nurture local film industry

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By Karl Hasten

Jeffrey Goodman is a man on a mission! As a matter of fact, he is on two missions. The first is to finalize funding for his debut feature film, “A Matter of Principle,” which he will film entirely in and around his hometown of Shreveport. Secondly, he is dedicated to reaching politicians, the business community, and the general public with a message that we have a tremendous opportunity to develop and nurture the film business that has been growing rapidly here, particularly since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. “It is ours to lose,” he says emphatically.

The Shreveport native was attending college at Washington University in St. Louis when he spent some of his junior year in France. “Some friends and I were in a café one night and started talking to a young French girl,” he recalls. “She asked us to make her a list of two movies, two books and two records that would represent what United States culture is all about.” They complied and then asked her to reciprocate with a list reflecting French culture. One of the movies on her list was “Pierrot Le Fou” directed by the acclaimed French auteur Jean-Luc Godard, who also directed such classics as “Breathless” and “Alphaville.”

“Three days later, I had the chance to see ‘Pierrot Le Fou’ at a theater in Paris,” Goodman says, “and I walked out knowing that I wanted to be involved in film for my life’s work.”

After graduating, he wound up moving to Los Angeles, the mecca for aspiring filmmakers. “I had worked on a commercial in Shreveport,” he recounts, “and really hit off with the director. I told him I was moving to Los Angeles, and he said to call him when I got there.”

Goodman called the director and was almost surprised when he delivered on his promise of help. He told Goodman he could use him on a project immediately where he would not be paid, but would make some great connections. “Right after that I got my first paid job,” Goodman says, “and it just grew from there.” He worked for six years as a production assistant with the highly regarded commercial and music video director Marcus Nispel. “Marcus said if I really wanted to advance my career,” Goodman recalls, “I needed to pick a department and concentrate on that. Since I wanted to eventually direct, I chose the camera department and started as a camera loader.” He moved from that position to camera assistant, working with such acclaimed cinematographers as Haskell Wexler, John Schwartzman and Emmanuel Lubezki. “I was learning from the best,” Goodman says.

In this position, he worked consistently. As a matter of fact, he worked so consistently that it was interfering with his pursuit of his real goal – developing projects to direct.

He finally made a bold move, quitting the film business to sell furniture.

“I got a job selling furniture at a high end Indonesian furniture store,” he recalls, “that coincidentally, was patronized by a lot of celebrity clients.” Among his clients were Britney Spears, Jessica Simpson, Seal and Adrien Brody who had just won the Best Actor Oscar for “The Pianist.” The more stable hours in retail gave him the spare time to schedule work on developing his own projects.

“Though I wanted to direct films,” Goodman admits, “I knew I wasn’t a writer so I would have to find material from other sources.”

He did just that while reading a collection of film noir short stories, “The Mammoth Book of Pulp Fiction.” That is where he came across the short story “A Matter of Principal” (only about seven pages long) by the writer Max Allan Collins, who wrote “The Road to Perdition.” I contacted him at his home in Muscatine, Iowa, and told him I wanted to make a film from his short story,” Goodman says. His first response was ‘No.’ Goodman then created a 19-minute short film from the story which Collins liked so much that he not only gave the enterprising young filmmaker the screen rights at no cost, but also agreed to write the screenplay, again for no money up front. From a man whose “Perdition” had just been directed by “American Beauty” director Sam Mendes with Tom Hanks and Paul Newman starring, this was quite a magnanimous gesture – and a solid vote of confidence for Goodman’s talent. Though the original title of the short story was “A Matter of Principal,” the name is now changed to “A Matter of Principle.” The main character, a retired hit man known as Quarry, has also appeared in five Collins novels and a total of three of his short stories.

To raise the \$2 million he felt he needed to make his film, Goodman decided to come back to his hometown. “I felt like this was where my family is and where I know the most people,” he says, “so I would have the best potential for raising the funds to make the film.”

To date, he has raised over \$1.4 million of his budget selling shares at \$50,000 each, structured much like an oil deal. He has set a cut-off date of Jan. 31, 2006, for fund-raising. “At that time,” Goodman says, “I will begin production even if the full budget figure is not raised.”

Goodman believes his commitment to fund and produce his film entirely in Shreveport could be another catalyst for the community to grasp the opportunity it has to build a film business here no matter how New Orleans recovers. “We have a very narrow window of opportunity,” he says, “to build relationships with the film industry that can be long term and enduring.”

Certainly the tax incentives now offered by the state have been an undeniable allure to production companies from Hollywood. Still, other states could enact similar incentives down

the road. “If we have proven ourselves to the producers working here now,” Goodman continues, “we can get them back regardless of what happens down the road.”

Building infrastructure will also be an asset in keeping these companies coming back. The proposed studio being built at The Port would be a strong draw for companies considering this area as a film location. Two things production companies says there is still a shortage of in the area are extended stay hotels and corporate housing. The business community should take note of that.

“Also, just how we respond to the celebrities who come here can also have an impact on the impression they all go away with,” Goodman asserts. “We need to be respectful of these people when they are out in public.” Think about it: Would you want to be stared at during dinner or have a bunch of strangers interrupting you while you eat? The answer is probably no!

Goodman also warns against taking advantage of the industry by inflating rents and other costs for the casts and crews working here.

“This is a great industry,” Goodman says, “that can have a significant economic impact on our area. For instance, we can’t control whether or not Texas legalizes gaming, which would impact our casinos, but, regardless, we can build this industry here to diversify our economy.”

Mark Smith, Louisiana’s entertainment industry director, has stated that Shreveport cannot sustain the film industry unless it invests in both its own infrastructure and its own films. Smith also notes that Louisiana currently has the third most productions in the country trailing only California and New York, and Shreveport now has 90 percent of the state’s film business. Our challenge now is to maximize the amount of that business we maintain.

Goodman himself is already casting his vision beyond “A Matter of Principle” (which he intends to begin filming April 1) by looking at other story ideas.

“I want to be a factor in helping grow the business here.” Goodman says. With a love for well-defined characters and well-crafted scripts, Goodman would like to “shape the future of film, not just make money.” Sound – or the sonic elements of a film – is a particular trademark that Goodman intends to weave through his future body of work.

The directors who inspire him, in addition to the previously mentioned Godard, include legends of the Golden Age of Hollywood like George Cukor, Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh as well as more contemporary names like Brian De Palma, David Lynch and Michael Mann. Goodman is more attracted to smaller, character-driven films. “I’m not really drawn to make blockbusters,” he says.

He was also drawn back to his hometown and is excited to be participating in its burgeoning film industry. He is committed to leaving a lasting legacy in his community and in film.