

ONCE NOT FAR FROM HOME

A STARS NORTH™ FILM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT IN ORLANDO

Stars North™ Wraps Production On Next Film Project

ORLANDO, FL (July 15, 2004) — Steadily emerging as a prominent center for independent film production, Orlando is making a name for itself among notable professionals in the movie industry. An innovative group called Stars North is leading the charge.

An Orlando-based production company with four films to its credit, Stars North featured Academy Award® nominee Seymour Cassel (*Stuck On You, Rushmore*) in its last motion picture “Time & Again,” which showcased the power of lifelong love between an elderly watchmaker, his dying wife and a clock he discovers that allows him to control time.

The company’s latest project, “Once Not Far From Home,” features an equally-recognizable cast of film and television stars including Erik Per Sullivan (*Malcolm in the Middle, Finding Nemo*), Skye McCole Bartusiak (*The Cider House Rules, The Patriot*), Daniel Hugh Kelly (*Star Trek: Insurrection, From the Earth to the Moon*) and veteran actor James Best (*The Dukes of Hazard, Shenandoah*).

“Once Not Far From Home” is a dramatic piece that explores the story of a curious little boy, a beautiful young girl and a mysterious old house that holds the secrets of their love and fate. The movie, set in the South sometime in the 1930s, is a captivating and thought-provoking tale that illustrates how first loves can last forever. Stars North shot the film July 7-10 in various locations around the Orlando area.

The movie was written by local filmmaker Todd Thompson who co-founded Stars North with Balinda DeSantis in 1999. He teamed up with partner Kathryn Ruscio Kelly and Smithy Sipes to co-produce the film.

“I believe that true love lasts forever,” Thompson explains as he talks about the premise behind “Once Not Far From Home.” “And true love is exactly that’s what this story is all about.”

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Thompson has felt a passion for movies since he was a child, spending weekends at his Uncle Steve's movie theater in Medina, Ohio not far from where the 33-year-old filmmaker was raised. Now, a Creative Development Manager in the Travel Industry Sales and Marketing Division of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts, he experienced his first taste of the Hollywood by landing with small roles in "From the Earth to the Moon" and "Dawson's Creek." He has also appeared in feature films like "The Green Mile," "Rosewood," "Contact" and "The Waterboy."

Thompson's desire to tell stories through writing and directing led him to form Stars North with DeSantis. Both share an avid fondness for films and are both longtime volunteers of the Florida Film Festival. It was through their experience at the festival that the duo learned if they wanted to make movies, they should start by doing shorts.

Together, Thompson and DeSantis have released "The Paper Route" (1999), "King Pathetic Creep" (2000), "The Chad Effect" (2001) and, with producing partner Kathryn Ruscio Kelly, "Time & Again" (2002).

"Once Not Far From Home" is the second in a series of four short films the Stars North team is producing. "Time & Again," their first film in the series, played at several respected film festivals around the country and earned over six awards, including Best Short Film and Best Original Score. Stars North has similar plans for its latest project, and Thompson says he intends to have the film completed in time for next year's Sundance Film Festival.

The idea for "Once Not Far From Home" was born one day over lunch back in July 2003. Thompson was sitting at the counter in his favorite Celebration, Fla. cafe when fellow Disney co-worker, Claudemir Oliviera, sat down and pitched him an idea.

"He [Oliviera] started telling me this story he had been tossing around about this little boy who falls in love with a little girl he meets one day on his way home from school" Thompson explains. "The little boy sees her only one time his entire life but carries her with him in his heart until the day he dies."

Thompson fell in love with the story immediately and thought it would make a great 'second chapter' to the film series they were working on. It wasn't long before he had a first draft of the script ready to show.

Thompson originally planned to direct the film as a follow-up to his work on "Time & Again." That was until he met and worked with local photographer and documentary filmmaker Ben Van Hook, whose sense of visual imagery is "phenomenal," Thompson says.

Van Hook's resume as a photographer and a filmmaker also captured Thompson's attention.

As a photojournalist, Van Hook shared a Pulitzer Prize among other awards for his work at the Louisville Courier-Journal before embarking on a freelance career that has landed him multiple assignments with Life, Sports Illustrated, People, Fortune and other major publications.

As a filmmaker, Van Hook's first feature-length documentary "My Father's Son," which explores the lives of a group of homeless men living in the woods outside of Orlando, was acquired by Showtime. Both Thompson and Van Hook were familiar with each other's work, but didn't meet until working on a commercial project last December in South Florida. It was during their car ride home that Thompson felt Van Hook was the ideal person to bring his latest movie to life.

"What especially interested me in this film project was that it was written primarily as a visual piece with very little dialogue," Van Hook explains. "The film is a story everybody can relate to - what it feels like to fall in love for the very first time and how that experience can effect us for the rest of our lives."

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Interviews

Interviews with actors **Erik Per Sullivan**, **Skye McCole Bartusiak**, **Daniel Hugh Kelly**, **James Best**, director **Ben Van Hook**, writer/producer **Todd Thompson**, and producers **Balinda DeSantis**, **Kathryn Ruscio Kelly** and **Smithy Sipes** are available upon request.

Please call (407) 292-6240 for scheduling.

About Stars North™

Stars North™ is an independent movie production company based in Orlando, Florida. The company produces commercially appealing, quality films with memorable characters, engaging plots and redeeming messages. Stars North™ is committed to developing and producing projects in Florida that employ local cast and crew for worldwide distribution. For more information, contact Stars North™ at (407) 292-6240, or visit the company's Web site: www.starsnorth.com.