

Local film maker hopes for hit

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By WAYNE QUESENBERRY/Staff

Charles Howard Thomas is learning to navigate the choppy waters of independent film making. He is the founder of Drydock Film Corp., which has produced three feature films and several documentaries and health videos.

“I wanted to name the company Boat out of Water,” noted the Brush Creek resident, “but can you believe it was taken?”

A graduate of Greensboro College in North Carolina, Thomas has a bachelor’s degree in English and Spanish with a minor in biology and political science. His master’s degree also is in Spanish.

“I was an interpreter for all three courts in Wythe County at one time,” Thomas said. “I did it part-time and now it’s a full-time position.”

While writing was always his first love, Thomas held a variety of jobs along the way to movie making. He worked in security supervision for the U.S. Department of Defense and at a diamond exchange center, taught Spanish at Carroll County High School, served as an outreach worker for migrant workers in Carroll and Grayson counties and produced health care videos.

Thomas, who claims Choctaw heritage, is an herbalist, hunter and trapper. He also wrote movie reviews for a newspaper in Winston-Salem, N.C., while writing screenplays.

“While I was living in White Plains, N.Y., I beat the pavement in Manhattan trying to get an agent,” Thomas recalled. “I even pitched a screenplay in California. Without an agent you can’t get anything done.”

A bid for an agent never materialized for him. Thomas decided to work on his own. His hopes are pinned to “Morning Song Way,” a feature motion picture which was five years in the making. Thomas wrote the screenplay, directed the film and produced it. Portions of the movie were filmed in Wythe, Carroll and Grayson counties. Other scenes were shot in Cherokee, N.C.

According to Thomas, “Morning Song Way” is the story of Katy Sage, a little girl who witnesses a murder committed by her mother’s boyfriend. The girl is hidden in the mountains with her great-uncle, an American Indian medicine man who teaches her the sacred ways of an ancient healing tradition. During her training, Katy helps to revitalize a small mountain American Indian community.

“They didn’t have film schools when I was in school,” Thomas pointed out. “I tell everybody I learned how to make movies at the University of Amazon.com. I bought a lot of books on production and direction but there is no book on post production. I didn’t know how to do any of that. That was the hardest part.”

Post production, he said, involves taking all the scenes filmed daily and putting the best shots together to tell the story. The process also includes adding music and credits to the film, Thomas stated.

The finished product has a running time of 106 minutes.

According to Thomas, “Morning Song Way” has won 12 awards on the independent film circuit. Included were honors from the Native American Video and Film Festival in Columbia, S.C., and the International Cherokee Film Festival in Tahlequah, Okla.

“I’m trying to get a distributor for the film,” Thomas remarked. “I’m hoping one of the big studios will pick it up.”

He has two other movies in post production – “Spies and Molasses” and “Marshals, I.T.” In the meantime, he is focusing on demonstration videos. Thomas recently completed “How to Catch a Coyote” with local trapper Donny Hodges.

“I chose coyotes because coyotes are a big problem in Virginia,” he stated. “Anybody watching the film can go out and trap a coyote. Most coyote pelts end up on Arctic parkas.”

Copies are available for \$29.95 at nanksttreasures.com.

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