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Derby film aims at Green for July shoot

By Kathy Antonioti
 Beacon Journal staff writer

POSTED: 07:50 p.m. EDT, Jun 17, 2010



Local All-American Rally Champ Dennis "D.J." Van Fossen, 17, will drive his Soap Box Derby car in 25 Hill, much of which is being filmed in the Akron area. (Karen Schiely/Akron Beacon Journal)

GREEN: Green will take on the role of a West Coast city next month when crews for 25 Hill, the movie inspired by the All-American Soap Box Derby, return to the Akron area to continue shooting of the film.

Green's Springhill Sports Complex on Fortuna Drive will be the site of the film's version of a rally race set in Sacramento, Calif.

It will mark the first time the film's main character, Trey Caldwell, portrayed by actor Nathan Gamble, meets his

nemesis, Kate Slater, played by Bailee Madison. They end up competing against each other all the way to Akron for the national Super Stock championship.

Producers are now accepting applications for about 500 local residents needed as extras on each of the three days of filming from July 26 to 28 in Green.

"It's a family event, so I'd prefer families apply, but we'll take single people, too," said production assistant for the film, Kellie Miller of Fairlawn.

Extras can work one, two or three days of the shooting.

Actor Corbin Bernsen, who wrote and directs the film, was scouting for possible race locations in April when he happened on the southern Summit County park that opened in 2008, said Miller, who also serves as Bernsen's assistant.

There were some doubts that the hill at the complex off state Route 619 was steep enough to pass as a legitimate racing hill, so Miller asked local All-American Rally Champ Dennis Van Fossen, who won the World title at Derby Downs in 2007, to help test it.

Van Fossen, 17, of New Franklin, drove his car down the hill as Miller videotaped it.

"That kind of sealed the deal. It's a beautiful location," Miller said.

Mike Elkins, superintendent of Parks and Recreation for the city of Green, said the film will evoke memories for everyone in the area who grew up with the All-American Soap Box Derby in their backyards.

"Hopefully this film generates new interest and participating in soap-box racing.

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We built the Springhill Sports Complex for multiple sports. . . . Who knew it would be used for soap-box racing?" Elkins said.

Van Fossen, who has been competing in derby races since 2001, drives a derby car in the film as a double for Trey Caldwell and his father, Thomas Caldwell, played by actor Timothy Omundson.

There will be no casting call for the Green shoot, said Miller.

Anyone interested in performing as an extra on the film should e-mail her at trecaldwell25hill@gmail.com. to apply.

Those responding should include photos of themselves in the e-mail and be prepared to bring pop-up tents, coolers and lawn chairs to the shoot. Details will be provided to participants prior to the filming, Miller said.

Bernsen will return to the area for the national championship at Derby Downs July 24, said associate producer Mary Ethridge of Akron.

"The film crew will be arriving in Akron July 15. It will shoot the All-American Soap Box Derby's championship week," Ethridge said Thursday.

Racers and their families will begin arriving in Akron July 19. Race finals are July 24.

Akron's Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. has offered Bernsen the use of one of its blimps for aerial shots of Akron and the Derby, she said.

The following day, July 25, the crew will re-create the Derby championship and will need hundreds of extras to fill the stands and act as family members, supporters and racers.

"Those who came to the April auditions at Derby Downs and were slated for the Derby scenes should return to Derby Downs on July 25 to film their scenes," Ethridge said.

Others are also welcome. Details will be released closer to the date, she said.

The crew will also be shooting in July at Baruth International Raceway, the track of the Cleveland Area Soap Box Derby. The Cleveland track will double as a track in Seattle where Trey earns his state berth for the international championship.

Those interested in being extras in the Cleveland and Akron races should also contact Miller at trecaldwell25hill@gmail.com.

The film is expected to wrap Aug. 2. Bernsen expects the premiere of the movie around the time of the 2011 All-American.

Kathy Antoniotti can be reached at 330-996-3565 or kantoniotti@thebeaconjournal.com.

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