

## MACOMB EAGLE

Shot on location in Macomb

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Two men sit in a broken down SUV in middle of the rural countryside. They smoke cigars and chat idly about life as a dog lies in the back seat and rain pours down upon the windshield. The man in the driver seat is Tim McKay, who at 37 lives with his wife of three years in Chicago, where he is a successful corporate lawyer. But Tim is unhappy with his life and has settled into "an extreme state of depression." Prior to his vehicle breaking down and him offering shelter to a wandering stranger – a "traveling" actor and his dog – Tim had been contemplating suicide instead of going on with his life as is. The man offers him a third option: that they switch identities.

Suddenly, a third man comes from out of the darkness of a sun-block screen and into the pouring sunlight, where he angrily throws his jacket off to the side of the road. He then makes an effort at kicking an orange traffic cone, which he nearly misses before he storms off to a nearby van. This man is I. Michael Toth, and what was just described before he threw his tantrum was a scene in a new movie called "Cast in Gray." But why is Toth so angry?

"You came at just the right time," joked a nearby producer before explaining the situation. You see, Toth is a triple threat in this film. Not only is he directing and editing it, but he also wrote the original screenplay based on a dream he had. In other words, this is his baby. And what Toth discovered was that they were not rolling film during an almost perfect acting job by Tim Burke (Tim McKay) and Stephen Angus (The Man) in which Toth's vision was almost fully realized. Think of it as writing a brilliant report for that sophomore history class and then losing all of your unsaved information – only just a tad more costly on the financial end. After all, time is money in Hollywood, and Hollywood has come to the backroads of Macomb for this film shoot.

Actually, this particular crew is not from Hollywood, but instead an independent production company from Chicago called Life Is a Dream Productions Inc. The Macomb part was true though, and the last scene was actually shot on a country road directly across from the Macomb Speedway, west of town. Chris Gentry, one of the film's producers, explained the choice for film location.

"Number one, it calls for a very desolate, rural area. And there's a lot of beautiful countryside here with great locations for that sort of thing we're looking for in the script," he said. "And probably the bigger thing is that I knew that we would get the kind of support down here that we need logistically with all of our production support, and we've gotten that times 10 so far."

"The community is great and that was one of the things we took into account while selecting locations," agreed Frank Herbert, co-producer of "Cast in Gray." "In a smaller, tighter-knit community like this, people are excited (by the film). The response and the help we've received from the city, the mayor of Macomb, the fire department, the Illinois State Police of Springfield, has been absolutely phenomenal."

If any of the crew knows about the community, it's these two guys. At least they should, considering both of the first-time producers are natives of Macomb. Following high school graduation and a year at WIU, Gentry transferred to Arizona State University, where he graduated with a finance degree. He was then in banking for about 15 years while dabbling in the independent Chicago film scene for 10 of those years. After meeting Toth three years ago, he decided he wanted to produce full time. Now that "Cast in Gray" is getting off the ground as first a 25-minute film – to be shopped around at festivals for more funding to be made into a full-length feature – he's getting his chance.

For Herbert, this is his first film he's worked on altogether. Following graduation from Macomb High School and two years at WIU, he transferred to Western State College in Colorado. He then moved back to the area in 1992 while working as president of a company called Torino Design Group – a manufacturer of mens' suits, sports coats and dress slacks in Italy. Not only is he producing the film, but Herbert was also the primary scout for film locations in Macomb.

Meanwhile, back at the shoot – only in its second day of production at that point – Toth has settled back in for the reshoot of the scene. That means the actors are back into character, the camera is definitely rolling this time and the SUV will once again get hit with the "rain" treatment, as provided by a Macomb Fire Department tanker.

"When you look at the monitors it looks cloudy and rainy (from the inside of the vehicle) because of the constant water flow on the SUV. And we're hoping for a little bit of help from God," Herbert said with a nod to the sky in hopes of actual rain. "It's going to be amazing when the piece comes out to see those scenes when we actually had to shoot in 45 mph wind gusts on a sunny day and how good they look. These guys are good." As for the rural Macomb shoot, Gentry said they are hoping to wrap by next week; "then we'll go into editing and hopefully release the film in a theater near you."