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# Take a bow, McDonough County

## Producers screen film at WIU to say thanks to those who helped make it

Sunday, May 15, 2005

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BY JODI POSPESCHIL  
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

**MACOMB** - Two Macomb natives were in town Saturday to premiere their new short film as a way to thank the locals who helped with them with the scenes that were shot in parts of McDonough County.

Frank Herbert and Christopher Gentry, the film's co-producers, were joined in town by film writer I. Michael Toth for the screening of "Cast in Gray" at Western Illinois University's Sandburg Theatre. There were two showings Saturday night for invited guests, with question-and-answer sessions with the filmmakers afterwards.

The 39-minute film portrays an encounter between a disillusioned businessman in his broken-down sport utility vehicle and a hitchhiking actor walking a country road with his border collie. The two men, who see the world very differently, eventually decide to trade lives.

The movie is based on a dream Toth had that his business partner at Life is a Dream Productions in Chicago persuaded him to write down.

"I had the dream in November 2003, and by March we'd started shooting," Toth said.

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"I came up with the idea in that state between sleeping and dreaming in the early morning, and I wrote down a few sentences."

Many of the scenes in the film were shot on local county roads with the help of local police officers and firefighters, as well as business owners. For about one week in March 2004, movie cameras, lighting equipment and a tanker truck full of water turned sunny, cool days into pouring rainstorms on various local roadways.

"When people see this film, they ask us how we got all that rain (for filming)," Gentry said. "We got really wet thanks to the Macomb Fire Department."

The film has been shown at a few film festivals across the country and won Best Short Film honors at two of them. The film company recently wrapped up a script to make the film into a two-hour movie and is now seeking financial backers to continue the process.

Gentry said that if the funding is found and shooting continues, the company is looking at returning to McDonough County for additional filming. If that happens, Toth said, about 20 minutes of the 39-minute short film would be included.

Gentry said his film company thought the movie was a good way to show off Toth's writing style, which works in multiple levels of meaning.

"It leaves the audience to create the film with us," he said. "There are three or four (interpretations) we hoped people would come away with, and they found more."

The film company thought it was a clever idea, Gentry said, to put together a short film first instead of just pitching an idea to investors.

Herbert, who still lives in Macomb, said the screening was a way to say thanks to the people and businesses that donated everything from food to rain.

"A lot of people showed up to give us a hand," Herbert said.

"We want to give people a chance to see what they had their hand in."