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'Waterwalk' dramatizes father-son canoe journey

Film chronicles pair tracing path of Marquette and Joliet


BY MICHAEL KING • GANNETT WISCONSIN MEDIA • AUGUST 29, 2010

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As dark clouds rolled in late Tuesday morning, Robert Cicchini and Chase Maser eased their yellow-finned oars into the still waters of the Fox River in Kimberly and headed upstream in a canoe toward Appleton.

The threatening skies were the perfect backdrop for the actors, who are playing the lead father-son roles in the [independent movie](#) "Waterwalk" being filmed at various locations in the Fox Cities from Oshkosh to Green Bay this week.

Cicchini, a veteran Hollywood actor, portrays Steve Faulkner, who wrote the book "Waterwalk: A Passage of Ghosts" published in 2008 about his 1996 journey with his 16-year-old son, Justin, retracing the route across the Midwest of French trader Louis Joliet and Jesuit missionary Jacques Marquette.

Shortly after arriving Tuesday at Sunset Point Park in Kimberly, [producer](#) and co-screenwriter Roger Rapoport reviewed the filming sequences with the actors.

"The big scene is coming up to the (Appleton) dam," said Rapoport, owner of Michigan Blue Lake Production, Muskegon, Mich. "You're going to end the scene just before you get into trouble."

The dramatic capsizing of the canoe, which went through the lower Appleton dam on the rain-swollen river on June 20, 1996, will be shot at a later date with stunt doubles. The near-tragedy is a key part of the story in which a father and a 16-year-old son grow closer together on the two-month, 1,000-mile river journey from Upper Michigan, across Wisconsin and down the Mississippi River to St. Louis.

"It's a beautiful story about a father and son with a historical angle to it, as well as being a father-son bonding picture, an adventure and history tale," said Cicchini, who has performed in more than 100 motion pictures and television shows, including "The Godfather: Part III," "Dream

Girls" and "War of the Worlds." "So I thought it was [compelling](#) and a really nice family-type movie."

The small production crew started filming Aug. 17 in Portage and then followed the Wisconsin River down to the Mississippi. Crew members filmed river and land scenes in Oshkosh Monday before coming to the Appleton area Tuesday and Green Bay and Oconto Wednesday. Additional filming will take place today at various Fox Valley area locations.

The movie, scheduled for release next spring, is the first being made about the 1673 Marquette-Joliet voyage of discovery. A 15-minute educational [documentary](#) is also being produced in association with Marquette University and the Michigan Council of History Educators.

Besides showcasing Wisconsin's scenery, about 20 state actors have landed roles in the movie.

"There's over 50 speaking parts in this movie," said Cicchini, who also serves as co-director. In June, he helped Rapoport cast actors during auditions at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater.

Cicchini said he spent a few days last week with Faulkner, the author whom he portrays.

"I'm not playing the part in a biographical way, but I certainly want to find his spirit and do something that he would [be happy](#) with," he said.

In the movie, Faulkner is the editor and founder of a small-town newspaper he sold to a larger conglomerate. In one of the early scenes, he loses his job when all the jobs are outsourced.

It's then that his adopted son suggests that they take a trip together. He resists because he needs to find a job and help care for two younger, disabled children but his wife encourages him.

"We're trying to get all the water scenes on the river in August before it gets cold," said Maser, 18, of Kalamazoo, who plays Justin Faulkner, the author's son.

That will be followed by a lot of interior filming in Muskegon, Mich., over the next few weeks.

Regarding his role, Maser said he "kind of had a poor relationship with my dad because he's always been busy working. Soon after I was adopted they had kids of their own. So that kind of makes me feel more of an outcast in my own family."

Among the people helping the production crew Tuesday was Kit Sorenson, economic development specialist with the state Department of Tourism.

"We're working with them and Friends of the Fox to make sure they have the necessary equipment, support staff and volunteers to pull off the movie that they're shooting," he said.

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