LIGHTS camera action



BY MONICA KREBER
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Noah left Morningside as a young man to seek his fortune. Now a successful businessman, he returns to Morningside to spread his wealth and reunite with his childhood friend Joshua, who is the town's most prestigious — and proud — lawyer.

The thing about Morningside is: only those who are familiar with Upstate South Carolina have really seen it; Morningside is the name of the fictional town and television series that will be filmed off Lake Keowee — hopefully sometime this fall.

OrionStar Productions, located in Los Angeles, has targeted the Upstate for filming Morningside. Debbie Kelley (formerly Cantrell), president of OrionStar Productions, is originally from South Carolina and still writes, directs and produces projects on the west and east coasts.

Kelley said the writer of Morningside, Danielle Leslie, is from the Upstate, as well. Kelley will be directing the show and her husband, Brian Q. Kelley, is co-writing.

"It's just always been a goal of mine to come to California and partner with people out here and build my film industry, and then just build the knowledge and projects back to South Carolina," she said.

Pre-production began in January. Filming will begin in October, and from there the show will go into post-production.



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Brandon McAlister is a Seneca resident and will be a camera operator for Morningside.

"We want to make a really strong package to take to the network with the hopes of them picking it up and doing ongoing episodes after that," Debbie Kelley said. "We have about six episodes under our belt to pitch to them."

Kelley said production hopes to write up to 12 episodes. The filming locations for Morningside include Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties.

The script was originally written as a seaside community before it was changed to lakeside. Once the show goes to the network, production would obtain the funding to hire a lot of people to work the series, which means Morningside would open a lot of doors for jobs in the Upstate.

"One of the things we want to do is employ as many people as we can," Kelley said. "Hopefully the series will run for a very long time."

The storyline follows Noah and Joshua's reunion in Morningside. While it is written as a drama, Kelley

said there is some comic relief throughout the two men's families.

"There's a lot of twists and turns and things people would not expect," Kelley said. "There's going to be a lot of cliffhangers in that first episode that is just going to have everyone's mouths hanging wide open. I can't wait for it to be done."

Seneca resident Brandon McAlister is the cinematographer.

"I feel very good about the show," McAlister said. "It's very interesting and we can do a lot of cool things."

One of the biggest things McAlister and Kelley want residents to understand is that the show would give the Upstate a chance to grow economically. There will be jobs available from casting extras, crew members, production assistants, office employees, catering, set building and construction, to leasing studio space and hotel rooms.

"It'll affect a lot of people." Kelley said. "We're going to be eating in the restaurants, renting cars, needing props and clothing, hair and makeup ... so it'll affect a lot of people and a lot of industries."

McAlister said it takes a "small village of people" to accomplish creating a television series.

"When you watch a movie or TV show, that's the reason you see that long list of names at the end (the credits)," he said. "That's the people it takes to make it happen."

Filming locations could possibly turn into tourism attractions, as well.

"It's great for the community to stimulate the economy," Kelley said.

The film will also include local talent. Tabitha Douglas Warren is a former Seneca resident who has gone on to be an award-winning singer-songwriter and has worked with artists including Luke Bryan, Lady Antebellum, Rascall Flatts, Miranda Lambert, Journey, Carrie Underwood and more. Warren has landed a role in Morningside as Joshua's wife, Anna.

The entire production staff is excited about the potential Morningside holds, not only as an economic boost for the area, but as a show people will come to love.

"I feel very confident," McAlister said. "I love the story. I can envision, already, the scenes, and how it would look."

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Tabitha Douglas Warren is a former Seneca resident, now a singer-songwriter, who will be in the show "Morningside."

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