

Rolling out the red

'Morningside' to premiere at the Lighthouse

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Upstate native Debbie P. Kelley, along with her cast and crew of the TV pilot series "Morningside," have created quite a buzz.

Since the start of production in South Carolina more than a year ago, the director and her husband, Brian Q. Kelley, co-producer and co-writer, have completed post-production for the series in Los Angeles.

Now it's time to roll out the red carpet for a premiere at the Lighthouse event center in Seneca on Saturday afternoon.

Though many in the Upstate have been anticipating the series, which was mostly shot in Seneca, Sunset and

Greenville, it was almost a project that didn't happen, according to Debbie Kelley.

"I kind of labeled this as 'the production that almost didn't make it,'" she said. "We just kept going. Even though when we started production, we had so many challenges — some of them that would stop production. We just kept going."

The Kelleys' production company, OrionStar Productions, funded the entire project except for \$315. There were long days and hours, and a few glitches with footage, but she said it only made everyone on the team closer.

"It was just a team effort," Kelley said. "We're really like a family now."

carpet

We just bonded through a really tough time."

One thing the series wasn't short on, however, was talent.

Almost all of the cast and crew are from the Upstate, with

the exception of a few who are from the surrounding areas in the region including Atlanta, Miami and Louisiana.

Kelley said it was

important to utilize as many people as possible from the Upstate, and they only expanded casting calls to the East coast.

"We've got a lot of talent coming out of

the Upstate," she said.

"I'm extremely impressed with the amount of talent the Upstate has to offer."

Even the original story, set in the fictional town of Morningside, about two unlikely friends — one born into wealth, and another who created his own — was written by Upstate native Danielle Leslie.

Kelley met Leslie at Greenville Little Theatre in 2008.

"Back then, I was doing hair and makeup, and she had written a concept of the script, 'Morningside,'" Kelley said. "She had several pages under her belt. I looked at it, and I thought it was a great stage play and I told her, 'Hey, keep going. I like where you're going.'"

Although Kelley thought it would make a great play, she wouldn't have guessed she would have been so involved in its future.

"Little did I know, later on down the line, I would produce it through my own production company,

SEE PREMIERE, PAGE B6

PREMIERE: 'It may go for years'

FROM PAGE B1

which I did not have at the time," she said. "That's how wild and crazy life is sometimes."

Interested in the concept, she wanted to give the story and characters some depth and a bit of comic relief. She and Leslie worked on the script around 10 months, sometimes for five or six hours at a time, before they went into production.

When Kelley needed somewhere to shoot it, she thought of home. Kelley, originally from Easley, said she knows all about the beauty her home state has to offer.

Two major scenes were shot at the Lighthouse event center, and one captured a lake sunset so beautiful Kelley said showing it in California was mind-blowing.

"It turned out so beautiful. When we had people here in California look at it, they thought that we had already color corrected it," she said. "We said, 'No, that's just how beautiful South Carolina is.'"

Local actor and Greenville native Joseph S. Wilson portrays Noah Wilson, a black man who comes back to Morningside after earning his wealth. He shot most of his scenes in Greenville, and one at Lake Keowee in Seneca.

However, he said he's looking forward to heading to the Lighthouse this weekend for the premiere and is confident about the work the actors have accomplished.

"I'm confident about where I sit," Wilson said. "It's pretty evident that I have done and am going to do everything that I possibly can to make this something special."

"I believe 'Morningside' was already special from the day that Danielle Leslie started writing her vision. Now, I think we're in the phases of seeing it come to pass."

Though Saturday's premiere has reached capacity, if the series — which has received four film festival selections — gets picked up, there may be more "Morningside" in everyone's future.

"Who knows? It may go for years. That's our hope," Kelley said. "It could be something we could put people to work for in the area. It's a triple effect when you can do that kind of production. A lot of people will benefit from us from being here."

Celebrity hair stylist and Greenville resident Bo Stegall, who worked in creative and production, believes the same.

"It's all about, for me, creating this unity within our community in the

place that I've always called home," Stegall said.

He said wants to see the film industry grow in the Palmetto State and for South Carolinians to not have to leave home to be able to follow their dreams in film — whether it be in makeup, props or videography.

"I want to bring that here to give them a job so they can follow their passion," he said. "I've always said, 'If you follow your passion, you'll find your purpose.'"

The Lighthouse is sponsoring Saturday's event. Organizers are expecting more than 200 people for the premiere, and those who have secured a ticket will get a piece of the red carpet experience.

"It's a party — just come out and hang out and watch the screening," Kelley said. "They're rolling out the red carpet for us, and I'm forever grateful."

christina@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6681



Tabitha Warren and Terrance Murphy, who play husband and wife Anna and Joshua Klegg III in "Morningside," take a minute to pose with their customized car on set.

Handwritten notes and a financial table are visible in the background. The table includes columns for 'TOTAL COLLECTION', 'CHECKS RECEIVED', and 'TOTAL CASH'. There are also some handwritten entries and a small table with columns 'TODAY', 'PAST 1 DAY', and 'PAST 30 DAYS'.

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

The Lighthouse is rolling out the red carpet for the premiere of "Morningside" on Saturday afternoon. The show was filmed in different locations throughout the Upstate.

FILE



RED LOCK
Top Guns
Beginning
Ending on
Completed on

NAME

Production

Top Guns

for



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

A scene filmed at "Dock's Bar," known to Golden Corner locals as the Cabana Club, resulted in a picture of a sunset that many in California didn't believe was real when director Debbie Kelley showed it off.