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Film crew sets scene at St. John's church

By Nanci G. Hutson

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NEW MILFORD — An independent film crew was filming scenes Monday inside St. John's Episcopal Church.

Near the altar, an actor dressed as a priest reads from the script of "Retribution." The lines will serve as a voiceover as the camera pans the sanctuary.

St. John's is one of several New Milford landmarks chosen by the founders of Good Film Productions of New York City to be featured in what is described as a "gritty" low-budget film. The plot centers around a devout priest who wrestles with inner demons and family secrets to convert an ex-convict who is a compulsive gambler.

The Rev. Gail Keeney-Mulligan said the film's producers asked a week ago if they could use the church. After checking their credentials, she agreed.

Beyond the sanctuary, the crew filmed scenes on the steps of the stone church, which sits near the Village Green.

"I had to check to be sure of the context," Keeney-Mulligan said. "With a name like 'Retribution,' I said, 'Wow, wait a minute!' But then I found that in the film the role of the church and the clergy was compatible to our life and work."

Joe Goodavage is the writer, producer and lead actor. He said though his film noir explores some dark subjects — addiction, suicide, sexual abuse and betrayal — it neither preaches nor condemns.

The scene at St. John's is titled "Cleansing of the Soul," with Goodavage's character seeking comfort as he confesses his sins. The film's priest, a recovering alcoholic, is played by Robert DeMarco, Goodavage's film company partner.

This is Goodavage's third independent film. His other two earned praise at the New York Independent Film Festival, where he won awards for best director and best drama.

On Sunday, in the midst of a rainstorm, actress Sarah Watterson of Queens, N.Y. — a one-time competitive swimmer who is a full time Manhattan bartender — risked the dangers of Kent Falls to portray a suicide scene.

A strong undercurrent pulled her beneath the water at times, but she said the scene was necessary to make the visual statement the film required.

"It was crazy," she said.



The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

Actor Robert DeMarco, left, gets advice from Joe Goodavage, right, as cameraman Samuel Price and assistant director Rico Racine prepare to film a scene from "Retribution" on Monday at St. John's Episcopal Church in New Milford.

Photography director Samuel Price said he has done everything from "hanging off ledges to falling into rivers" to capture just the right images.

As he maneuvered his camera around St. John's Church, he said, "Every shot counts so much."

The only local resident associated with the film is actor Rico Racine, its associate producer and assistant director.

Racine has donated his south New Milford home to the cast and crew during the last three weeks of filming.

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For information and to see a film trailer, visit www.goodfilmproductions.com.

Staff writer Lynda Wellman contributed to this story.