

Johnson Lee lets it all out in quest to enter the film world

ADVERTISEMENT



The McCauley Company
www.mccauleycompany.com

By Samantha Fields, Townsman Staff
GateHouse News Service
Thu Aug 02, 2007, 12:59 PM EDT

Wellesley -

For Johnson Lee, the game plan is to let it all out on the third date — and see where it takes him.

The 2002 Wellesley High School graduate earned his degree in film production and screen writing from Emerson College last year, and is now trying to work his way up through the film world, one shoot at a time.

Three-thousand miles from Hollywood, Lee is making contacts, building his resume and learning the ropes of the industry that he first grew interested in during his senior year in high school. When he had to do a video project for his humanities class, he said, “it was the first time I actually had to produce, manage and organize a full-out project ... and that was when I realized, here’s something I like.”

Over the course of the past year, Lee has assisted on several films, both big and small, that have been shot in the Boston area, including Disney’s “The Game Plan” starring The Rock, and “Let It All Out,” a short movie directed by a fellow Emerson alum, Kristen Lucas, who he connected with over the Internet. Currently, in addition to his job in technical support at Avid Technology in Tewksbury, Lee is working as a second assistant director on a second short movie for Lucas called “The 3rd Date.”

“One big challenge is having patience,” he said. “It’s not every day that a movie comes to Massachusetts and you get paid for helping out.” Most of the openings for production assistants or other spots on the film crew are volunteer, or pay very little. Still, he has found, “you just have to keep searching.”

His first gig, “Let It All Out,” was shot for a Rhode Island film contest and was unpaid, but he joined the crew for the experience. Their challenge was to write, produce and edit a short movie in just 48 hours. That movie, which they submitted an hour after deadline, won the “Best in Show” spot on the contest’s DVD, and the experience has paid off for Lee in other ways, primarily in terms of expanding his network and skill set.

After “Let It All Out” wrapped up, Lee got a call from Sony Pictures TV offering him a job as a court researcher for the “Judge Maria Lopez” show. Though the position, in reality, was little more than photocopying small claims documents for the show, he took it, wanting to be involved in any possible way with film or media. All the time he was continuing with his search — scouring the Internet, looking in newspapers, talking to his growing list of contacts — and eventually, in September 2006 he was offered

full-time a job as a production assistant on Disney's "The Game Plan," which would be shooting at Gillette Stadium and other "Boston hotspots," he was told, through November 2006.

His job, in short, was to contact hundreds of extras and prepare them for a variety of scenes. "On an average day I'd be talking to about 100 people on the phone, maybe meeting five to 10 walk-ins in person, and checking e-mail for any newcomers," Lee said. It was hard work. Shoots, which assistants were told would generally last 12 hours, nearly always exceeded that, he said, and Disney often failed to pay overtime. But it was fast-paced and, most importantly, "it meant working on a movie," he said.

Since then, friends and other extras he worked with on the film have alerted him to other opportunities, both on features and shorts, in a variety of capacities. "The connections you make are eternal," he said. He just finished production on "Green Grass," a short movie about immigration, and appeared as an extra in a few scenes shot in Boston's Chinatown for "21," a new movie starring Kevin Spacey.

The path may not be direct, but little by little, Lee is following his dream — he believes taking the little roles is worth it. "You could be a production assistant on day one, and by day two, someone calls in sick and suddenly you're promoted to editor. I've seen this happen before," he said. "Even though we're not in Hollywood, it's a small world here in Massachusetts. I've always believed that small things go a long way, and who knows, that may just get [me] to Hollywood one day."