

By
**KEN
MCGORRY**
mcgorry@optonline.net

This indie production is shooting digital on Long Island.

The Red movie next door

MANHASSET, NY — Chris O'Donnell was down the street. Jenna Fischer was right next door. And Red One cameras seemed to be all over my neighborhood — director Michael Weithorn and cinematographer Tom Harting used as many as three of the cameras in last month's all-digital shoot for *A Little Help*. This indie drama, which follows a widowed mom (Fischer) who gets enmeshed in lies in an attempt to provide care for her young son, is aimed at completion in time for Sundance 2010.

The film is produced by Secret Handshake Entertainment's Dena Hysell and Joe Gressis. Gressis is also an experienced Avid editor who is working on Final Cut for this film.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

So, is a Red shoot like this the future of filmmaking? Hysell disagrees. "It's the present of filmmaking!" she asserts.

The film crew, which took up as much as two long blocks of my neighborhood with equipment and lighting trucks as well as passenger cars, vans for extras, catering and a video tent, also used the grounds of the nearby Science Museum (doubling as a classroom setting). Other extras — neighborhood youngsters brought on the backyard set to fill out the guest list for a child's birthday-party sequence — included my two sons.

The feel of this production is definitely not run and gun. And Gressis was thankful to have weekends off from shooting — so he could edit at a spot in Manhattan.

"I'm actually editing the R3Ds natively," Gressis says, "at a very high quality. They've got QuickTime wrappers, but I did not transcode to ProRes and it actually works fine." The QT wrapper allows Gressis to work with less than the whopping 4K files Red records.

This Final Cut work feels the same as any other editing job, he says, "which is the exciting part about it. We're editing a movie and very, very high-quality material and files, and you edit them just as normal stuff. The difference is, it's so much information that I can't put fades or dissolves in at this point; it would bog down the system too much, but that's okay — it's mostly a straight-cuts movie."

The filmmakers decided jointly on using the Red camera, Hysell says. "It's a matter of finding the camera that's able to give you the look that you want; that your DP has already worked with enough and is comfortable

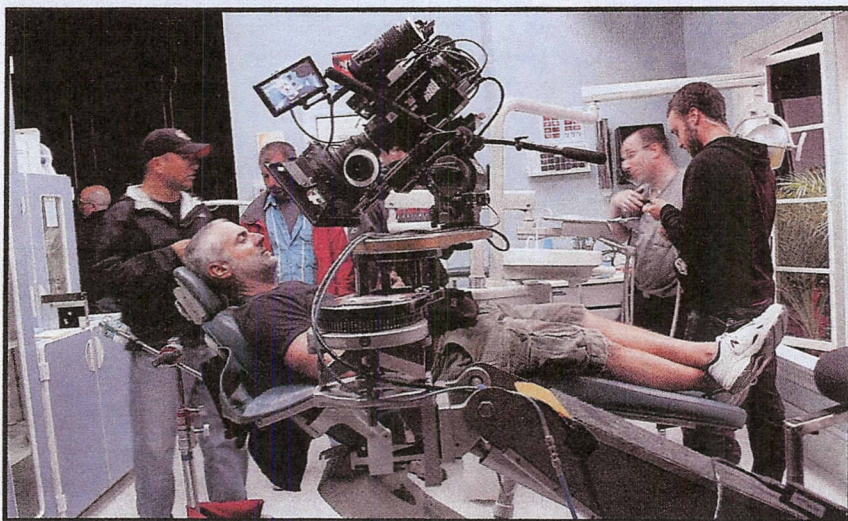
with it; and that fits your budget level."

A Little Help is Harting's third Red movie. "With Red you get an incredible film look with a camera that's incredibly reasonable," Hysell says. "When you're concerned about your budget it makes a lot of sense to use it."

Gressis and Hysell feel liberated from the traditional 35mm grind of film processing and next-day dailies. Hysell says that Red's

film — set it up and light it like film, and use film lenses." But, if you wind up with extra time on a shooting day, Hysell says, "then your director is going to want to do a creative angle or a creative move with the camera."

A Little Help's R3D files will get a 2K DI on a Nucoda at Mega Playground (www.mega-playground.com) in Manhattan. "The end product is going to be DPX files," Gress-



Three Red One cameras are being used for the indie feature, *A Little Help*.

instant on-set gratification "is so fantastic. We have our Red tech on set pulling stills and doing some grading so while you're shooting a scene you can see what the scene is going to look like."

In the tent, tech Matthew Henderson sits across from the two producers color grading stills on a Mac, while Gressis and Hysell divide their attention between the live feed from a 720p video tap and Henderson's work.

Shooting Red is not so quick-and-easy that you might plan on shaving a week off your production schedule. But Hysell likes another way Red can be helpful on the set. "Because of the cost, you can often be running two cameras on any set up." She says the filmmakers already carried a second Red body on-set as insurance against a malfunction. "There are times we'd use the second camera to get two angles and get your close-up while getting your master. You can increase the amount of coverage you're getting without increasing the time."

FILM-LIKE

Gressis cautions, "You have to shoot it like

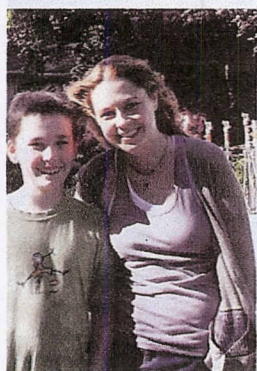
film, which we can then use to print to 35 for exhibition. Exhibition is 2K at the best. Because we're shooting on Red, if there is a need to go back to it at some point in the future, we'll be able to."

Acquisition is very similar to the film experience but, the producers say, the real Red savings comes in the post process. "Red reduces labor on the post side," Gressis says. "I can do this by myself — I don't even need assistant editors."

Gressis, acting as editor, says he is all set up to cut the film on the same Mac he has in his apartment. He uses G-Tech G-Speed drives and says his 6TB is plenty for the whole movie.

Gressis and Hysell have two G-Tech clones made of the original capture files so there are three identical copies of each day's shoot.

"This is really exciting for us," Hysell says, "because doing the film digitally was a specific choice that we made. To have it work so smoothly is pretty amazing. It's turned everybody who has not worked with Red before into believers."



Actress Jenna Fischer on set with Danny McGorry, who appears as an extra in the film's party scene.