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Takeone News

Two talented filmmakers meet in the first Illinois International Film Festival

By Sarah Frielink

On the weekend of Sept. 15, three filmmakers - Shawn Fox, Jeffery Wolinski and Michael Wolinski - brought the world of independent filmmaking to the city of St. Charles through the debut of first Illinois International film festival. These three filmmakers, who own a film production company in Westmont, wanted to create a film festival to "celebrate the art and entertainment of film in all its forms." Filmmakers from all over the country joined together for the opportunity to learn, grow and exhibit their films in the historic Arcada Theatre in St. Charles. Two of these talented filmmakers, Eben Kostbar and Craig James Pietrowiak, answered some questions about the making of Karma Café - a 10-minute short.

Pietrowiak, an NIU alum, has been making award-winning independent films for the past six years including the television pilot Wrigleyville. He joined Kostbar, the director and writer of Karma Café, as producer and assistant director. Both filmmakers met during filming of Wrigleyville: Pietrowiak as the director/writer/producer and Kostbar as one of the lead actors. Together, they share an incredible dynamic for acting and filmmaking, which brought them together for the filming of Karma Café. This uplifting short film won the viewer's choice award at the Washington, D.C. short film festival and is currently touring other film festivals. After the screening of Karma Café, Kostbar and Pietrowiak shared some insight into their background as filmmakers and their overall experience with Karma Café.



Describe one of your first memorable experiences as an actor in film/television.

EB: Recently I played the character, "Johnny" on the pilot episode of the CBS drama The Unit, which David Mamet created. I think there is nothing cooler for a guy than being an actor on a David Mamet project.

Recently you directed and wrote the short film Karma Café, which has been well received in several film festivals. What was it like directing for the first time in Chicago?

EB: I thought it was one of the most rewarding experiences in my life. I feel so blessed that it is being received so well. Last year I was fortunate enough to be an actor in an independent pilot called, Wrigleyville that was shot in Chicago. I immediately fell in love with the city. When my project Karma Cafe finally came together, Chicago was the perfect fit. I hired all Chicago actors and Chicago crew. I would recommend filming in Chicago to anyone.

Many people might think that making a 10-minute short cannot be that difficult, but I beg to differ. I spent many sleepless nights working on this short, but in the end I learned an enormous amount about filmmaking.

Shawn Patrick O'Donnell did an incredible job acting. How did you find such a cast?

Yes, the film wouldn't be what it was without Shawn or for that matter the rest of the cast. When I wrote the part of the cashier, I wanted an eccentric, bubbly, over-the-top character. I just thought it would be more of an interesting choice rather than the obvious relaxed/yoga guy. When we held casting sessions in Chicago, Shawn was hands down our top choice. He was able to add so much more than what was written on the pages to bring that character to life. Also, Paige Jarvie [who plays Amber] just lights up the room - without a doubt I think she's going to be a very successful actress.

TO: Last summer you starred as Shaffer in the television pilot, Wrigleyville, created and directed by Craig

James Pietrowiak. Now Craig worked with you on Karma Cafe as an assistant director/producer. After Wrigleyville gets picked up by a television network, do you and Craig still want to work on films together?

EB: This business is no different than any other business. I think that if you surround yourself with talented people you can be successful. Fortunately, I was able to meet and work with Craig and I know we will do many more projects in the years to come.

TO: Briefly describe some highlights of your experience working with Eben on Karma Cafe?

CJP: Eben is someone who I worked with in another production. During that time, he played one of the lead parts as an actor. I have watched him come around as a filmmaker during the making of Karma Cafe. I have always suggested to actors to try writing and directing a short. Eben wrote, directed AND edited Karma Cafe. I have tremendous admiration for that type of determination. He is no doubt a better actor because of it.

TO: Now that Karma Cafe has won an award in Washington, D.C., what's next on the agenda for you and Eben?

CJP: Hopefully, we will get more credit and attention for our work. The goal is to raise awareness and money to shoot a feature length film.

TO: What type of feature film do you want to shoot in the future?

CJP: I am hoping to shoot one of the features I am writing a psychological/drama about dreams.

TO: What kinds of productions are you working on now?

CJP: I recently assisted directed a feature, *Something is Killing Pate*, with director Leon Lovano and actor "Jocko Simms." The goal of this production is to tour film festivals in 2007. I wrote TV pilot, *living with Allen Hall*. The story is about life through the eyes of a budding alcoholic in his 30s. I am interested in shooting it with Chicago or Illinois independent finances.

TO: You have been making award-winning independent films for the past six years. How have you changed since you started in the business?

CJP: I have a better understanding of story development and how to put together a film.

Karma Cafe has toured several other film festivals including The Chicago Reels Shorts Film Festival on Oct. 1. The film has also been invited to screen in The Bahamas International Film Festival. To see the film Karma Cafe for free, have a chance to vote or comment on it, go to [HYPERLINK](#)

["http://www.flymz.com/"](http://www.flymz.com/)www.flymz.com,

click on films/trailers and type in Karma Cafe. For additional information or future news on this film, go to [HYPERLINK "http://www.karmacafethemovie.com/"](http://www.karmacafethemovie.com/)www.karmacafethemovie.com