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Islander's movie job not all Hollywood glamour

By Eileen M. Daly

For the average person, the concept of working in the movie industry conjures up visions of glamorous movie stars, exotic locations and oodles of cash. But island photography gallery owner Benjamin Thomas has a slightly different perspective.

Thomas, who has been working as a location scout since 2005, describes his job as somewhat less than glamorous and exciting.

"It's more like planning a wedding every single day," Thomas said.

A "location scout," according to Thomas, is someone who looks for places that will be amenable to the shooting of particular scenes. But that isn't all that's required.

"I'm responsible for helping with all of the logistics: Insurance, police, security, parking – everything it takes," he said.

Apparently, it takes a lot to make a movie.

According to Thomas, an average day of shooting a film can cost the film company anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000. With that kind of money on the line, he said, it is his job to make sure nothing gets in the way.

"If someone is mowing their lawn and the sound is interfering with the shoot, it is my job to find the guy and get him to stop," he said. Conversely, if someone is around the location is upset or angry about something, it's his job to soothe things over.

"I'm the guy that gets yelled at," Thomas said. "You really learn to deal with people."

Thomas has worked on films such as "The Proposal" with Sandra Bullock, "Dan in Real Life"

with Steve Carell, Juliette Binoche and Dane Cook, and most recently, "The Zookeeper" (due to be released in October) with Kevin James and Rosario Dawson.

So what is it like to work with movie stars?

Again, Thomas said, it's not as glamorous as it sounds.

"They're there on the set like everyone else," he said. "You lose the luster and excitement once you realize that they are not the people they play. They are just people."

He also added that though he might see a star like Sandra Bullock at the snack table or hanging around the set, "crazed fan behavior" is not considered acceptable.

"You wouldn't want to approach someone for an autograph or anything," Thomas said. "We pretty much just leave them alone."

Thomas originally got into the business through two friends of his, Colin and Ian Walsh, who were already working in the industry.

"I basically begged and pleaded with them to get me in," Thomas said. Now that he's in, he said, it's almost a classic case of "be careful what you wish for."

His job generally begins with the local Teamsters wherever the scene is shot.

"The Teamsters are the guys driving the trucks," he said. "I have to make sure they are going to have a place to park so that the equipment can be unloaded."

To be sure that the trucks can park and get everything else underway, Thomas said he is often required to begin his day at 3 a.m.

"It's not unusual to work from

three in the morning until nine at night when they are shooting a movie," Thomas said. "It makes it a little difficult to have a life outside of the job."

Since Thomas does hope to have a life outside of the movie business, he's begun putting together his exit strategy. The Benjamin Thomas Gallery at East Ferry, where Thomas sells his photography work, is part of that plan, he said.

Thomas found the space for his gallery while working on the movie, "The Proposal," he said. The space was used to shoot bookstore scenes "Dan in Real Life" and I remembered it was available, he added.

Thomas looked up the owner and soon rented the space where the gallery now stands. He's not quite ready to leave the movie business just yet, however.

"It's a case of really good money and since I'm in the union, I also have insurance," Thomas said.

Although he hopes to eventually transition out of the movie business, the recent recession – combined with an extraordinarily rainy summer – has not had a positive impact on business at the gallery, Thomas said. So he'll be staying in the movie business for the foreseeable future.

But it's not all bad, he said.

"People are really interested in the movies, so it opens a lot of doors," he said. And the occasional perks don't hurt either.

"I recently got free tickets to see Paul McCartney at Fenway," Thomas said. "Now that was fun."

Walk paths of local artists and writers with Newport Historical Society

The Newport Historical Society will offer a walking tour showcasing celebrated Newport artists and writers of the 19th century on Saturday, Sept. 5, at 1 p.m.

This one-time tour covers the

Kay/Catherine "Top of the Hill" neighborhood and focuses on celebrated artists and writers, such as Jane Stuart, Henry James, Clement C. Moore, Julia Ward Howe and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The tour passes many architecturally significant properties, including houses designed by Richard Morris Hunt and the firm of Mc-

Kim, Mead and White.

The tour begins at the Museum & Shop at Brick Market, 127 Thames St., and ends at the Jane Stuart exhibit at the Redwood Library & Athenæum. Tour length is approximately 90 minutes. Cost is \$15 per person and \$10 for NHS members; reservations are strongly recommended. Call 841-8770.

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