

Lights, camera, action for film students

By Liesa Evans

It's a cold Thursday afternoon and SAIT's film and video production students are on location for their last day of filming.

The scene is a frenzy of activity. It's late in the day, they are an hour behind schedule and they need to shoot some outdoor scenes while there is still light. Packed tight between the dark and narrow aisles of Aquila Books, on 16th Avenue N.W., the crew rush around to strike the set and move it all outside.

The air echos with the clanging metal of light stands being collapsed and the static rip of duct tape being pulled up from the carpet.

A crew member runs around collecting abandoned Tim Horton's cups threaded along the top of the oak book shelves. The producer can be heard assuring the good natured storekeepers the crew will be out on time.

"It seems very chaotic but it actually is very organized chaos," Janna Gummo explains.

Although this is her first experience producing a dramatic film, the 28-year-old manages the chaos like an expert. She loves the work.

"When it comes together and you get a great product you know all your hard work was worth it."

Hard work is exactly what it is.

The film, titled 'Back Issues,' represents four months of 12 – 16 hour days for everyone involved.

Written and produced by second-year students, it is now in its final stages of production with an anticipated April release date.

Instructors in the program, which has a proven credibility in industry, say the script is one of the film's biggest strengths.

The script takes us on the journey of fictional journalist Grant Richards. Sent by his publication to Afghanistan, the writer uncovers a tainted water scandal in one of the local villages.

But his efforts to report the truth are stonewalled by his magazine which has grown into a giant corporation with protectionist interests.

When they hire a young and passionate female journalist to help rewrite the story, a romance unfolds amongst the underlying thread of intrigue, mystery and corporate vice.

"It's just a great looking film," says Laurie Johnson, an instructor with the program for 18 years. He is impressed with his students' latest collaboration, which has produced a mature script in both theme and character depth.

Johnson's pride of their accomplishment is apparent when he speaks of what his students achieve in industry.

The program has provided well-trained graduates and

practicum students as support crew to many prominent local productions over the years.

More recent examples include the locally filmed T.V. series Wild Roses and the Canadian blockbuster movie Paschendale.

He credits this success on the hands-on experience and the ever-changing technology SAIT provides.

"We are starting to generate pretty good credibility in industry."

That credibility was recently recognized by the American Express Foundation which initiated a three-month funding drive promotion last fall.

According to Johnson, the corporation will donate to the program up to \$50,000 which will mostly be used for scholarships.

The generous sponsorship helps the polytechnic continue to develop the next generation of film talent.

Back on the set and now outside, a cold wind numbs the crew's hands. Filming on a narrow strip of sidewalk along 16th Avenue, they startle each time a semi-truck rolls by. Some truck drivers blow their horns and laugh as they zoom past. Film crews attract a lot of attention.

Huddled around the camera, the students smile and review the final scenes just shot.

Pleased with what they see they all agree - it's a wrap.



Photo by Liesa Evans

SAIT student Krasimira Sakareva marks the start of the scene while on the set of the film Back Issues in Calgary on Jan. 28, 2009. It was the final day of filming the production which is expected to be released in late April 2009.



Photo by Liesa Evans

Key grip Jesse Dautremont works on the set of the film Back Issues in Calgary on Jan. 28, 2009.



Photo by Liesa Evans

SAIT student Dave Milan poses while acting as assistant gaffer and 1st assistant camera on the set of the film Back Issues in Calgary on Jan. 28, 2009.