



Tim Reid and Tamara Curry prepare for a scene in "For Real."

Local film industry gets boost from a new Tim and Daphne Reid movie.

by Deveron Timberlake

On the Set

On a low-budget movie set in a contemporary Midlothian house, a few dozen earnest recruits are getting a force-feeding in film production.

Though the Richmond area is no hotbed of movie action, a handful of hopefuls has slowly, steadily moved here to find work in the industry — itinerants in search of stardom or artistic expression or rent. And in this scene-stealing house on the river, the work, shed mostly of any glamour but shimmering with potential, offers a three-week run.

"A lot of students who have limited experience are getting to work on this project," New Millennium Studios' Daphne Reid says of "For Real," the picture in production.

Among those students: Niko Godfrey, who parlayed a Virginia State degree and a few years in the trenches into her role as assistant director; Liz Boggis, a Londoner who hopes her film-crew work here will support her future documentaries; and Jennifer Shaeval, a casting agent and actor who moved to Richmond from Boston. go to New York or L.A.?" Shaeval asks. "Here we can actually get work, which is pretty exciting. We're supporting a local cause this way."

The local cause Shaeval's referring to isn't specifically New Millennium, but the redefinition of the Richmond area as a creative proving ground for film actors and technicians. "For Real," which has a budget

of less than \$1 million, employs 75 actors and crew members.

Tim Reid directs and stars in the film, a Pygmalion story in urban trappings. (It co-stars newcomer Tamara Curry.) The picture will get a limited theatrical release — just 10 screens or so — and then a home-video release on the studio's new distribution label, New Millennium Home Video.

"People think we're trying to prove something to Hollywood. We're not," Tim Reid says. "People ask us, 'Why make these low-budget movies?' I think they're confused about our motives. How many more 'Boyz in the Hoods' can be made? 'Boyz, the comedy'? 'Boyz, the musical'? We're all tired of it. We want to show other sides, to give actors a chance to stretch in other areas."

He mentions the satellite dishes around the world that serve up what he contends is a skewed version of black American culture, and adds, "I want to have a little control over what goes into huts in Ethiopia. Or the rest of the world."

New Millennium Studios "is the last large dream I'll entertain," Reid says. "We're searching for people who want to dream, and we're trying to keep it open enough that people step in to work on the images and content that we want to do."

With five feature films and about 40 commercials completed in the studio's first four years of operation, the Reids and partners Martin Jones and Gov-

elect Mark Warner want to expand the base of qualified crew members in the region. "If you're going to grow a market," Jones says, "you build your base. Crew members are now able to stay in Virginia instead of traveling out of state to work."

And those crew members have responded. "They're dead serious," Kim Fauss says of the crew on "For Real."

Fauss leveraged a package deal in offering up her family's home for several days of shooting; Fauss' son's school will get theater improvements, and film club students will be allowed to observe the production. One more thing: "I told Tim it has to be fun and an adventure," Fauss adds.

In return, Tim Reid says, "Look at this house. Yes, we're a micro-budget movie, and this house could be in any multimillion-dollar production. But the owners are appreciative of our dream. This is not a game to us, this is a dream."

"For Real," Reid explains, is not about the mean streets but about emotional intimacy and connection — a message that rings particularly true for the fledgling filmmakers on this set, training in 14-hour days beside cinematographer Jon Parks and veteran crew heads. In a near-noiseless dance among cables and lights, they're trafficking in illusion and purpose, and the lure of projects yet to come.

Shooting wraps before Christmas. ■