

Exploring the Horror



Robert Lyons — Daily Times Above, Scott Spears stands in a Portsmouth alley on Friday with a digital video camera. Spears, a Portsmouth native and cinematographer, has just completed filming "Horrors

Portsmouth

By Aerin Curtis, Contributing Writer

In Central Ohio, a local cinematographer, along with an Ohio-born film cast and crew, began shooting an independent movie about World War II earlier this summer. The movie, titled "Horrors of War" is scheduled to be ready for the American Film Market in November.

Portsmouth native Scott Spears, the film's director of photography and co-cinematographer, was but one of the group returning to his home state for the project. According to members of the design team, filming in Ohio offers many assets for an independent project.

"Working in Ohio has been nothing but a benefit," said the film's co-writer and co-director, Peter John Ross, himself an Ohio native from Reynoldsburg who originally chose to film in Central Ohio because it was so visually similar to areas he had visited in Germany and France.

"I got the idea to film in Ohio when I was in Germany — that was what spawned the idea for me. I was traveling on a train between France and Germany, and I looked out the window. I expected to see something exotic, and said 'this looks just like Ohio.' It really wasn't all that different," said Ross.

He soon discovered that filming in his home state did have some unexpected advantages.

"It's so much cheaper to work here than in California. There, everybody and their brother is trying to make a movie. Here, there are a lot of camcorder movies, but this was a real film with a realistic budget."

Spears agrees with this assessment. "The people (in Ohio) are just more giving and generous (than in Los Angeles). In Ohio you can make the dollar go farther," he said.

Spears said many of the extra actors came out for food. "In California you'd have to pay all of them. (Those from Ohio) slept in tents for the weekend because we fed them. The war re-enactment guys were fabulous," he said.

In Los Angeles, property owners want a contract before filmmakers can shoot, and Spears said it often costs money before someone will even discuss a contract to shoot.

"I love coming back to Ohio and working on movies," he said. "In L.A. it's so tense. In Ohio, or anywhere in the Midwest really, if you want to shoot someplace, people are practically begging you to shoot in their yard."

Spears graduated from Portsmouth High School and received a bachelor's degree and Master of Arts from The Ohio State University in Columbus. To date, he has shot five full-length movies in Ohio, including the drama "The King of Iron Town," shot in Ironton. Spears said he knew since childhood that he would be working in film.

"I began making Super 8 movies when I was in middle school with some friends, and it just grew from there," he said. He recalls finding the listing for a film and media class at PHS and searching for a way to have the class taught. He and friends persuaded Pat Lucas, an English teacher, to have the class.

"She taught the first media class at the high school," Spears remembered. "I had a weird group of friends in high school. We ran around with video cameras and tried not to be arrested."

Spears first met Ross working in the film scene in Columbus.

"I met Peter John Ross in Columbus and shot a couple projects for him — a commercial and some short work — and then he began coming up with a horror film set during World War II," said Spears.

He described the film as "Band of Brothers" meets the "The X Files."

In addition to filming in Ohio, Spears has also returned to Portsmouth at various times to try his hand at another line of work. Following in the footsteps of Lucas, Spears spent some time teaching the media class at the high school during the 2001-02 school year. He followed that stint in academia with one at Shawnee State University.