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Back to the drawing board

By Nathan Countryman, Assistant Editor

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ALGONA—With a new executive producer, director and screenwriters, the “Algona” film project was in town the past week, visiting with local officials and scouting locations for the film to use during filming.

The new film crew also has a connection to Algona.

Screenwriter Sandra Longo was born and raised in Algona years ago.

“When I grew up in Algona, I never really heard much about the Algona P.O.W. Camp,” Longo said. “It wasn’t till I was at a wedding in Des Moines that I met somebody from Gilmore City who mentioned it that I found out about the history of the camp in Algona.”

Longo, with co-screenwriter Liz Finn-Arnold, sat down to write a script for the picture 15 months ago.

“It’s a little surreal to grow up in this town and not know about the camp, only to come back as an adult and be able to tell the story of the camp for audiences to enjoy,” Longo said.

Longo currently resides in New Jersey with her husband and sons.



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Jerry Yocum describes some of the history of the Algona P.O.W. camp to the film crew on the “Algona” film project. From left: screen-writer Liz Finn-Arnold, director Robert Stock, executive producer Raw Leiba and screen-writer Sandra Longo.

"Not much has changed to Algona over the years," Longo said. "It feels exactly the same to me as it did when I grew up here. The people are still down to earth and friendly."

Finn-Arnold was attracted to the film because of the uniqueness of the story.

"There's potential to raise awareness about a portion of history people might not know about," Finn-Arnold said. "This is a story that is actually about something important and unique, which is something you don't get in Hollywood anymore."

Finn-Arnold worked with Longo on the 2008 documentary "The BlueBelles" about a group of elderly women who met at a YMCA swim class.

Director Robert Stock was attracted to the project by the story.

"The script on the Algona P.O.W. camp really opened my eyes because it is something that if you didn't see it yourself, you wouldn't know it was out here," Stock said.

According to Stock, the goal is to move into pre-production on the film in September or October, with principal shooting to begin in spring of 2011.

Stock has four feature films under his belt as director according to the Internet Movie Database and has two other films in pre-production.

Executive producer Raw Leiba was also drawn to the project because of the uniqueness of the project.

"I'm a history buff, but I didn't know that there were camps of German P.O.W.'s here in the United States," Leiba said.

Leiba was moved to executive producer of the project in April and his first calls were to hire Josh Shelov and Stock for the project. Shelov is making a documentary on the Algona P.O.W. camp.

Leiba has acted in several television shows and movies, as well as served as stunt coordinator and producers on other works.

Besides visiting with local officials, the crew also took time to tour the Camp Algona P.O.W. Museum to gain even more background on the camp in Algona. They also got a chance to review some early footage of interviews from Shelov's documentary.

Cutline:

Sidebar: Shelov's documentary project underway

Joshua Shelov's first visit to Algona went as well as expected.

"It was extremely moving to see the memories that people have about the Algona P.O.W. Camp," Shelov said.

Shelov interviewed 11 people on his first visit to Algona.



"Without question, this was just my first visit to Algona," Shelov said. "My interviews with Don Tietz and Jerry Yocum have barely scratched the surface of what they know."

Shelov's next visit will probably focus on getting visuals of the town of Algona and surrounding communities, as well as more potential interviews.

Shelov was preparing from Algona to be headed over to Germany in the next few weeks to begin collecting reflections of German P.O.W.'s from the camp for inclusion in the documentary.

Shelov is aiming for a February release of the documentary.

If people who were around back when the camp was in Algona want to share memories or be interviewed for the project they can contact Shelov at campalgona@gmail.com or by phone at 914-479-8834.

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