

Musical being shot with local actors, local settings

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LOWER TOWNSHIP — It was a school night, and Vineland sixth-grader Kayla Jackson was out way past dark at an Atlantic City betting parlor.

Not to worry. It's only a movie being shot here and at other Cape May County locations in recent weeks.

Smiley's Atlantic City OTB wasn't even real, just a movie set using a vacant storefront sandwiched between Peking Palace and Oriental Nails at the Bayshore Mall.

The movie 'Standing Ovation,' which will be released in February, is described as an action-packed musical that will be a family film with dance, comedy, action and fantasy integrated into a rags-to-riches story that culminates in the joyful Christmas season. It's about two competing girls singing groups, the Standing Ovations and the Wiggies.

Austin Powell, 14, of Egg Harbor Township, is just glad he got a part. Powell is a freshman at Egg Harbor Township High and is in the Drama Club and the Thespian Honors Society. His vocal coach is Sal Dupree, of Linwood, a co-producer of the film, who invited him to audition. Dupree is Mr. Wiggle in the film.

"I sang for them and did part of a script. I got a call one day, and they said I got the part. I'm excited to be here every single day. I'm not even working today. I just came by the set because it's so much fun," Powell said.

The film is filled with children from southern New Jersey as the filmmakers sought local singers, dancers and actors ages 7 through 16.

The director, Stewart Raffill, is from Los Angeles, but 90 percent of the actors are from New Jersey. The scene shot Thursday night at the Bayshore Mall featured Kayla Jackson, 11, of Vineland, a sixth-grader at Landis Middle School, and Joel Tabasco, 12, of South Philadelphia. Producer Diane Kirman said Dupree has taught many of the actors.

"Sal Dupree had a lot of talented kids, many on Broadway and in local shows. We



Press photos by Robert Newkirk

Kayla Jackson, 11, of Vineland, right, and Joel Tabasco, 12, of South Philadelphia, act out a scene Thursday night for the film 'Standing Ovation' at the Bayshore Mall in Lower Township.



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took his protégés and wrote a screenplay around them," said Kirman.

There are only a few adults in the film. Kirman said it's really a movie for kids and about kids and that will be the target audience. Part of the proceeds will go to the children's wing of Lankenau Hospital in Pennsylvania, where Dr. William Lewes, a movie buff involved in the film, is a surgeon.

It's a low-budget movie, and unit production manager Jim Walsh said locals have really helped keep costs down. Shots have been done on the Ocean City Boardwalk, The Cove Beach in Cape May, the Wildwood Boardwalk and other locations. Dance numbers are being shot at Charter Tech High School this weekend.

The setting for the film is Atlantic City.

On Thursday night, a vacant Bayshore Mall storefront was turned into Smiley's Atlantic City OTB for the scene that was shot numerous times. Kayla, playing a girl named Brittany, is trying to get her grandfather out of a betting parlor, until he starts winning.

Takes were done from different angles. The girls had to do it again just for the sound man.

"Cut. Very good. Let's do one more," belated director Raffill.

"All right, roll the sound please," Raffill said minutes later.

Bayshore Mall shoppers streamed by to see what was going on, but the movie makers didn't mind the occasional intrusion.

"The locals have been so good helping us," Walsh said.

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