

## There's something strange in the neighborhood

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LLCs have been formed, investors sought, people are coming in from around the country, and an unlikely serial killer is burying bodies under the bushes of her home in a Greenville neighborhood.

Strange happenings for Greenville indeed, but those are just some of the activities involved in the filming of a new motion picture written, directed and produced by Greenville's Eric Rogers.

He has formed his own production company, Anomaly LLC, and begun work on his first independent feature film, Elizabeth Gunness, a dramatic character study of an older woman known by all the neighbors as decent and caring, but actually hiding a dark side that leads to bodies hidden around her lawn. Despite its theme, neighbors should not expect blood-curdling screams, chain saws or gore since the film looks deeper into the mindset than the actions, describes Rogers.

The project boasts a \$250,000 budget - small by Hollywood standards, but significant for a small business starting from scratch. Rogers is offering 500 shares in the film for \$500 each and trading a bunch of in-kind services to cover everything from crew and cast to catering and collateral marketing packages.

"The biggest obstacle really is money," Rogers says. "So far, we've been able to find what we need. Once you get started shooting, the momentum usually starts rolling."

As a film teacher at Greenville County's Fine Arts Center with close connections to a vast array of students and others in the industry, Rogers has found a deep pool

of talent to work with. He has also benefitted from other local friends, neighbors and businesses for materials, locations and even a few small roles. He also has the assistance of his wife, Jo Carol Mitchell-Rogers, an award-winning visual artist and teacher at Anderson College, as well as Wendy Overly, a former drama teacher at Clemson University, who will play the lead role.

Jane Dorn, owner of Greenville marketing firm Copia Design, helped produce identity content such as business cards, letterheads, a business prospectus detailing the plans, and designs for the movie title and credit pages.

"It's been fascinating. It's a great opportunity to work on something I've never worked on before," Dorn says. "It's such a different vantage point."

As production begins, Rogers says he has raised about half the projected budget. Shooting will take place over the next two weeks at his home and a few spots around town, then he anticipates about six months of editing to complete the project.

Like many businesses, once the product is completed much of the hard work - and cost - is still ahead in the form of publicity and sales.

"Our goal is to get it to all the major festivals, at which point we hope to get it to a distributor," Rogers says. "Obviously, the ultimate goal is to get as wide a distribution as possible."

Promoting the film and getting placement in top festivals like Telluride and Sundance, and others in Chicago, Toronto and Florida is challenging. Rogers is excited about the possibilities, having won a Bronze Cindy award for a student film from the Association of Visual Communications and having worked as cinematographer on a movie that opened at Telluride in 1997 and went on to two other prominent festivals.

The possibilities are endless. After all, with examples like Robert Townsend's first film, Hollywood Shuffle, which had a budget of only \$100,000 and grossed \$5.2 million at the box office, or the indie model Blair Witch Project, a film that brought in \$140 million on a budget of only \$35,000, there is clearly an opportunity to break into the market.

Rogers explains the typical breakdown for profits from movies leaves about 15% for the production after the distributors get approximately 35% and theaters take their 50% share. If the movie has relative success, revenue can continue through further distribution on video, DVD and television.

In the prospectus for the film, Rogers is up front about risks, explaining, "Anything is possible and independent films do sometimes make it big, but if you invest you need to be certain of the risks involved. You may not see another dime of your investment ever again. What you will see, however, is a great film that your money helped to produce."

For her part, Dorn would love to see Elizabeth Guinness become the next big blockbuster, but she says the experience itself has been worthwhile and if her investment "doesn't turn into something that's fine too."

But Rogers holds promise that his investors will recoup their initial contributions and share in even more with a 50% split of all returned profits to the production.

"If we ended up with \$10 million at the box office that is pretty successful and would be a good return on investment for everyone," he says. With that type of success, Anomaly LLC would have a foundation to move forward with future films, developing a following such as other independent filmmakers like the Coen brothers or Spike Lee.

"They are really doing everything they can to do this right," Dorn says of Rogers and his film crew. "This is, I believe, the first of many great things to come for them."