

Movie makers spread wealth

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Local merchants, hotel owners and a variety of tradespeople have begun to feel the financial impact of the making of a Kevin Costner-Paul Newman movie, now shooting in Maine.

Hotel and bed-and-breakfast rooms are becoming scarce in the Bath area, where the movie, "Message in a Bottle," will begin filming later this month. And merchants who sell everything from signs to 50-year-old wooden oars are benefiting from having a major motion picture under production nearby.

At Cabot Mill Antiques, in Brunswick, three people from Warner Bros. a couple weeks ago bought more than 400 items to be used in the movie.

"They just piled things up," said Georgia Niederhaus, who handled the sale. "And they just kept coming."

The antiques were bought to be placed on the set of the film. Many were nautical in nature, and included oars and fishing reels, as well as bread tins, lanterns and cigar boxes.

Asked how much was spent, Niederhaus only would say, "It was a lot."

In Bath, people from Warner Bros. showed up at Brick Store Antiques. Owner Polly Thibodeau said they took pictures around the shop then returned with a shopping list for 15 items and a check.

At Taylor-Made Signs in Cook's Corner, Brunswick, the movie company bought more than 50 custom signs, everything from small arrowed signs to others reading "extras parking" and "crew parking."

Another sign read:

"A MOTION PICTURE IS BEING FILMED IN THIS AREA...ENTERING THE AREA CONSTITUTES YOUR PERMISSION FOR OUR USE OF YOUR IMAGE IN CONNECTION WITH OUR MOTION PICTURE."

Owner Calvin Taylor said he loved doing business with the movie makers, and worked hard so they could meet their deadlines.

Lea Girardin, who runs the Maine Film Office, said today she doesn't know how much the film makers plan to spend in the region. Part of that will be estimated, she said; once the production company releases a "below-the-line" budget, saying how much will be spent on the movie with the exception of the principal actors and crew members' salaries.

In March, the movie's location manager, Tim Wilson, estimated that somewhere between \$1 million and \$3 million will be spent in Maine. About 20 percent of that low budget number will be spent locally, Girardin said.

But even that is deceiving, she said. "That figure sort of expands itself," adding that crew members spend money in local shops and restaurants.

"They can't go home," she said. "They're stuck there."

Some jobs, such as carpenters and electricians, are being filled by Mainers. "I know that people are getting hired to do various things," she said.

Production is now underway in New Harbor and is expected to move to Phippsburg by the end of May.

"Message in a Bottle" is a love story, based on the just-published novel by Nicholas Sparks.

Just down the road from Taylor's sign-making business, the long-vacant former Bath Lumber yard on the Bath Road is the "nerve center" for the production, Girardin said.

Meanwhile, Niederhaus said she'll plan to watch for the movie, looking for the items she sold, and hope they come back to before it's done.

"I asked them to come back," she said. "But please bring Paul and Kevin."