

# Campus bar hits big the screen

■ Rennie's Landing, the legendary stomping ground for students, lands the lead role in a new movie written by a University graduate and former bartender

By Rebecca Newell  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Michael Garrity is similar to anyone else when reminiscing about a favorite job, as he tells stories about his experiences during his college years as a bartender at Rennie's Landing.

The difference is, Garrity's story is coming to the big screen.

What started out as an idea while bartending in the early 90s became a reality for the University graduate, who after three years of long work of "Rennie's Landing,"

*"I would hope [the movie] is well-received critically and that it's picked up by a distributor and shown in theaters ..."*

Michael Garrity  
'Rennie's Landing'  
screenwriter

wrapped up filming Friday in Eugene. Garrity's brainchild was bolstered by the knowledge and support of cinema greats Steven Spielberg and Mimi Leder.

After his graduation in 1994, Garrity moved to Los Angeles and secured a job with Spielberg as a personal assistant and then production assistant, working on the movies "The Lost World" and "Amistad." When Spielberg set out for Europe to film "Saving Private Ryan," Garrity switched jobs and began working for director Leder.

After four years as a production assistant, Garrity decided to try his hand at directing "Rennie's Landing," with help from Marc Fusco, another Spielberg assistant. The duo utilized the contacts they made working for Spielberg and were able to access equipment and space at a fraction of the cost.

"Getting the financing for the film was the toughest part," Garrity said. "We found private investors — actually they kind of found us — but it took the longest time. It's always tough. You're always putting out fires left and right. But it went surprisingly

well."

Fusco and Garrity teamed up with producer Mike Gabrawy, who worked as a production assistant on "Independence Day" and has worked on his own independent films.

"I met Mike and Mark two years ago [and] we started developing the project," Gabrawy said.

Though the primary shooting of the bar's interior was done in Los Angeles, shots of the original Rennie's, as well as of the campus, will be included in the movie. Already, Rennie's is beginning to see the slight effect of the movie's publicity with increased on-line T-shirt sales.

"Initially, of course, I thought there was a slim chance of it ever happening," Rennie's owner Jon LaBranch said. "I've had dozens of people kidding me about who will play me in the movie."

LaBranch described Garrity as a personable guy, the one "who got by on guile late at night" while working as a bartender.

For Garrity, being back close to family and his old stomping grounds was only enhanced by the great weather the crew experienced while wrapping up filming at the bar and on campus.

"The UO was great about letting us shoot," Garrity said. "We got some great shots that will only make the movie look better."

Garrity said the best part of the movie was "just getting it done, seeing cut scenes, which is very exciting. Just the fact we're to the point we are now is great, because it rarely happens. We're lucky."

With filming behind them, the crew will now concentrate on preparing a first cut of the movie, with a target date of the Sundance Film Festival's October deadline. Sundance, the nation's largest exhibition of independent films, could greatly effect the opportunity for "Rennie's Landing" to be picked up by a distributor.

"We hope to get into some festivals and into theaters," Garrity said. "We want everyone to see the story we have to tell."

Gabrawy echoed Garrity's hopes, and reiterated the message he feels is such an instrumental part of the film.

"I would hope [the movie] is well-received critically and that

it's picked up by a distributor and shown in theaters [and that] it touches people as a smart Generation-X film about the purpose of life," he said.

With goals of having the movie in theaters sometime next year, Gabrawy stressed that the movie would appeal to audiences because of its "universal theme."

"It's a story about empowerment," Gabrawy said. "It's about four friends trying to find their place in this world."

"It's a study of taking control of your life."

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## Cowboys

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training to be the first Americans in outer space. NASA replaces them with a chimpanzee and the pilots are forgotten.

Forty years later, there's a system failure in a Russian satellite, and the only people who can fix it are Eastwood and his gang of geezers, who designed the guidance system code used by the satellite.

But that's not really the point. The interactivity between Frank Corvin (Eastwood), Hawk Hawkins (Tommy Lee Jones, 53), Jerry O'Neil (Sutherland, 66) and Tank Sullivan (James Garner, 70) is what makes the movie somewhat worthwhile.

The foursome play off each other well in a "Grumpy Old Men" way, and while the movie tries to build things up to the dramatic conclusion in the sky, the jabs while on the ground prove to be the highlight.

You have Tank, the Baptist minister, Hawk, the crazy prop

duster who gives teenage kids thrill rides, and Jerry, the skirt-chasing roller coaster designer who never turns down an opportunity to flirt. For example, when the guys are getting introduced to a NASA engineer played by Marcia Gay Harden, Harden asks Jerry what his nickname is. Jerry holds her hand, kisses it and says, "You can call me ... anytime."

Sure, the laughs aren't of the deep-chortle variety, but it does the trick. If only the movie would have focused on four old men training to go to space, and not about the actual mission, it would have been fine.

And while you're not going to find any dazzling special effects such as an invisible man, or a group of hot babes dancing on a slippery bar, you do get the privilege of seeing four saggy, old bare asses.

Hey, it sure beats spending your time watching another group of (donkey) asses down there at the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles.

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