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'How Can I Help?' Film project is debut for Fountain Hills Man

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How Can I Help? Director Stephen Kessen and his co-producer, Adrienne Stephany.



Posted: Wednesday, October 19, 2016 12:00 am

 A premed student and an IT guy meet in a bar.

Posted on Oct 19, 2016 by Linda McThrall

The IT guy says, "I'm making a movie. Do you want the lead part?" And the premed student answers, "Yes."

It didn't happen exactly like that, but Fountain Hills resident William Kenny and Tempe resident Stephen Kessen have made a movie together.

Kessen, 26, a Collins College graduate, wrote and directed, How Can I Help?, a holiday romantic comedy starring Kenny as Nick, a fellow who becomes disillusioned by the consumerism and hype surrounding Christmas. The story is based on Kessen's real life attempt to give friends and family favors instead of gifts.

"Last year, I went out on Black Friday and was totally disgusted," Kessen said. "I thought it would be a really cool thing to do 31 favors, one each day during December."

In theory, Kessen's idea was a good one. In practice, he said, there were misfires.

"A friend of mine wanted help to build a garden," he said. "I helped her do that, only to have her boyfriend get totally [upset] because he thought I was dating her or something. It was kind of awkward."

Kenny, who is 25, has a degree in microbiology from Arizona State University. After he graduated, he went to work in a lab, working from 6 p.m. to 4:30 a.m.

"I just decided after some serious thinking that I didn't really want those hours," he said. "But because of those hours, I could do things like make announcements over

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the intercom using different accents, and making up stories."

His co-workers encouraged him, and he serendipitously tried out for a part in a commercial. He won that extra role, and he has been in other commercials as well.

"This is my first time to be cast in a major movie," Kenny said. "It has kind of spring-boarded me into more parts."

He has parts in two more movies, and he works in other film projects such as industrial promotions, in-house productions and web shows.

How Can I Help? is in post-production now and will soon be sent to film festivals. Kessen hopes to have the

film picked up by a distributor in time for Christmas this year, but he added it might be too late to have it on the big screen by this holiday season.

"If a distributor does pick it up, they may decide to hold it until next year," Kessen said. "We'll just wait and see what happens."

Adrienne Stephany is assisting Kessen with the post-production work. He had met her some time ago but had forgotten she had a film background, too. He remembered it when he started shooting How Can I Help? and brought her into the project.

"She has been a great help," he said.

The cast and crew are all local residents, living in various parts of the Valley.

Kenny was born in Chicago. He and his parents moved to Fountain Hills when he was three. He attended local schools until he was eight, then the family moved to Mesa where he was home schooled until he was 13, when he finished high school and went on to Mesa Community College. He graduated from MCC when he was 15, then finished his bachelor's degree when he was 20. The family has moved back to Fountain Hills.

"My parents have been very supportive of my journey," he said. "They are great about my acting. I don't think I could have done this without their help and belief in me."

Kenny said he loves science, but he has a strong need to express himself creatively. He also is a salsa dancer, another outlet he says he loves.

"I am really happy to have found these outlets for my creativity," he said. "I want to keep pursuing these avenues and to discover others."

Since the two men are relatively young, it's a pretty good bet they each will make a mark on the world.

"Stephen is a one-man show," Kenny said of his director. "He has a wide breadth of film acumen. I think he will definitely do a lot."

Kessen said Kenny was a natural to play the role of Nick.

"He just had exactly the look and personality for the part," he said. "He played me very well."

Kessen said he would announce the outcome of the film festivals.

"As soon as I know something, I'll let you know," he said.

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