

**LOCAL**



Michael Tittinger/The Daily Press

**TONGUE-IN-CHEEK:** Wayne Campbell, a member of Santa Monica filmmaker Matt Stanton's production team, goofs around with an armadillo that met its demise while scouting film locations in Western Texas.

# Where the wild things are: Film crew messes with Texas

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in a faraway land.

"Bless you, bro ... I hope you run, run with all your might when they set you out there," he said, holding still the Sony palmcorder. "People are ready to blow your ass away."

Recently, Stanton and sidekick Wayne Campbell, whom he aptly describes as his "comic relief," recently completed their second trip deep into the heart of Western Texas, a region of open expanses where Stanton hopes to shoot his script dubbed "North Starr."

His other hope is that the people will be equally open-minded.

Having already secured numerable locations on which to shoot the project during a three-day blitz in early August, this stop in Bush country was all about the people. Sitting across from a dozen or so local residents in the Oplin High School gymnasium — all that remains of the now-defunct Oplin High School — Stanton laid his cards on the table.

"I have a wonderful story to tell, but I'm not gonna sit here and try to sell you," he told the collection of ranchers, housewives and students. "I honestly think we can make one of the best films of the year. "We're gonna make a winner ... because the script's a winner and your town's a winner."

Convinced he needs the town's approval, as well as assistance, in order to see the production through, Stanton enlisted Campbell's estranged father, Doug Campbell, to spread the word of the Tuesday night gathering. The younger Campbell, who now resides on the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio, hadn't spoken with his father for more than a decade before the film project began to gain some momentum, just one of the many sidebars that makes this decidedly un-Hollywood project an intriguing tale in its own right.

The makeshift production team spent close to two hours explaining the intricacies and necessary sacrifices involved in filming a full-length feature film. Told to expect in upwards of 30 people at the meeting, an unfazed Stanton addressed

the handful on hand with equal aplomb and enthusiasm, showing no signs of disappointment in the meager turnout.

"That's OK, the word is gonna spread," he said while smoking a Camel outside the meeting place. "Next time, there will be twice as many. That's the way it works down here ... people are gonna want to be a part of this."

At least, Stanton hopes so. In addition to a short biography, script summary and Daily Press news article detailing his first visit to the area in the summer, his town meeting handout also included a request list seeking contributions such as location use, farm equipment and even meals for a hungry crew.

If the reaction of those on hand was any indication, the fledgling filmmaker can expect to receive considerable assistance from the community, with the majority signing a contact sheet and reviewing the request list as they filed out into the warm autumn night.

Doug Campbell, whose dedication to daylong-cooked brisket and his quasi-Neil Young sideburns make him a natural to portray the film's bar owner "Slag," carefully studied the request list overnight, telling Stanton the following day "some of these things might be hard to put together."

In Stanton's eyes, any assistance from the locals is welcome.

"We are so lucky," he often tells Wayne Campbell.

During the course of the meeting, Stanton repeatedly reassured those on hand that his was not a vanity project, nor a money-driven scheme. In what could be construed as a Hollywood pitch intended to tug on the heartstrings of the local community, he promised they would share in any rewards reaped from the effort, touting the possible donation of such things as a new fire truck.

But the notion was earnest. Towns like Oplin and Baird and Putnam, Texas, are just such places that drip with Americana, the types of towns that do yearn for a shiny new fire truck, the kind of people who will drive 20 minutes to deliver a

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