

The few, the lonely, the horrible

Filmmaker chooses Northland for next project, "Duluth is Horrible"



KEVIN HORN/SUBMITTED

Actor Shane May stares out toward Lake Superior in a scene from director Vincent Gargiulo's upcoming film, "Duluth is Horrible."

BY KATIE LOKOWICH
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San Francisco-based filmmaker, Vincent Gargiulo, has been in Duluth since Jan. 26, scouting locations, auditioning actors, and filming his project, "Duluth is Horrible."

"Everyone was sort of up in arms about this guy from California coming to Duluth calling (it) horrible," said Vincent Gargiulo, director and writer of the film.

The film is a series of vignettes, or short stories, that chronicle a few lonely people during the bleak winter months in Duluth.

"So, we focus on a few different characters in Duluth," Gargiulo said. "They're all different and they all have different things. But the general core emotion of the film is that each of them is looking to establish some sort of relationship in some way."

The characters in the film are all at different points in their lives: some are breaking up, some are just meeting, and others are struggling to stay together.

"It's definitely a tragic comedy," Gargiulo said. "There certainly are some very serious, darker, 'not a damn thing funny about them' scenes, and then there's exactly the opposite, too."

The gist of the vignettes is that all these stories are human experiences that can happen anywhere—it just so happens to take place in Duluth.

"This film is a little bit different," Gargiulo said. "I'm trying to be a little bit more dramatic, a little bit more personal, and we'll see how it goes."

Gargiulo has been consistently working on different projects since 2007, but has had the film "Duluth is Horrible" in the back of his mind for a few years. Gargiulo has had his work featured on Lopez Tonight, the Washington Post, the Huffington Post, Attack of the Show, and numerous film festivals. His better known work includes "The Muppetless Movie," "Taste the Biscuit," and "David's Pizza Commercial."

"I've been telling people that (the name) came to me in a dream. The complete title, 'Duluth is Horrible'—that may or may not be true," Gargiulo said. "I'm not sure where it came from originally anymore."

After coming up with the title, Gargiulo admits he wasn't sure where Duluth really was.

"I finally came up with a story that kind of fit with the title. I've been making films all the time,

and it was time for a new project," Gargiulo said. "I was feeling a little adventurous and I said, 'Well, I'll do this 'Duluth is Horrible' movie.' But you can't exactly make a Duluth is horrible film without ever going to Duluth. And I knew nothing, zero, about Duluth."

Gargiulo had a two-week plan for his short film and raised

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\$10,000 on Kickstarter to fund the project, which initially drew complaints from some locals about the title.

"I think a lot of people thought I was making some sort of documentary about how horrible the town is," he said. "But it's a completely narrative film about love, loss, and weird stuff."

Gargiulo sent out a casting call online before arriving in Duluth, so people could see the different types of characters.

"Everything has gone really quickly," Gargiulo said. "All last week was spent finding locations and getting actors. And we did about two days of auditions.

I'm really happy with who I got. They're all local actors, and a lot of them have some acting experience. They're doing a great job so far."

Gargiulo has received a surprising amount of support from the Duluth community.

"People have heard about it and have contacted me by email or Facebook, and they've all been really helpful in helping me find local places around town," Gargiulo said. "Everyone I've talked to has been super supportive."

For Gargiulo, Duluth didn't turn out to be too horrible.

"The thing that I will miss when I leave here is the people that I've met," Gargiulo said. "Everybody has been super friendly, wonderful people, and I will definitely miss them once I leave, even though I've just kind of met them. I'm good friends with a few people already."

Although Gargiulo has not seen everything he's wanted to while in Duluth, the change of scenery was a welcome relief.

"I've done so little traveling, unfortunately, in my life—which was part of the appeal of coming here," Gargiulo said. "I've certainly never dealt with snow of this type of magnitude, where it's like an active participant in your day.

And I've certainly never driven in it. I'd say that driving here is a little horrible—you can quote me on that."

After less than a month living in Duluth, Gargiulo feels right at home in the frigid temperatures.

"This cold business, that's new to me too—it never really gets this cold where I'm from," he said. "I've been here about a week and a few days, and I actually am sort of adjusted to it at this point."

Gargiulo's goal is to make a film that has very serious themes juxtaposed to the absurd or funny, and see how it flows. The title still started it all for the filmmaker, who said he tried many different cities' names, and nothing sounded quite as good as Duluth.

"I'm kind of big on titles," he said. "A lot of my films have titles that don't make any sense, but they're slightly provocative or there's some parody of something. I think a title is really important."

Gargiulo finished up shooting the film this past weekend and hopes to finish editing "Duluth is Horrible" by April to begin submitting it to film festivals.

"It's a short film; the shots are simple and effective," Gargiulo said. "Really, the biggest thing is the post-production, the editing, and getting music and sound."

UMD students make waves at Polar Plunge

11th annual Duluth Polar Plunge raises money for Minn. Special Olympics

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Since 2002, some Duluthians have been making the plunge into Lake Superior's frigid waters to raise money for Special Olympic Athletes of Minnesota. The Polar Bear Plunge is a statewide fundraiser, with 16 locations, that raised \$2.8 million for Special Olympics Minnesota last year.

"It seems that ours is always the favorite amongst the others," said Todd Kuusisto, an arson investigator for the Duluth Police Department and a Duluth Plunge committee chair. "Other locations copy a lot of the stuff that we come up with, which is good, because it's all for the same cause."

Last year Duluth had 1,004 plungers and raised \$169,316, according to plungemn.org.

"Currently online it shows that we've collected \$63,000, but that doesn't reflect people walking in with cash or marking down their donations online," Kuusisto said.

The event will be held lakeside in Canal Park Saturday Feb. 16, with check-in at Grandma's Sports

Garden beginning at 12 p.m. Even if participants registered online, everyone is required to check in at Grandma's.

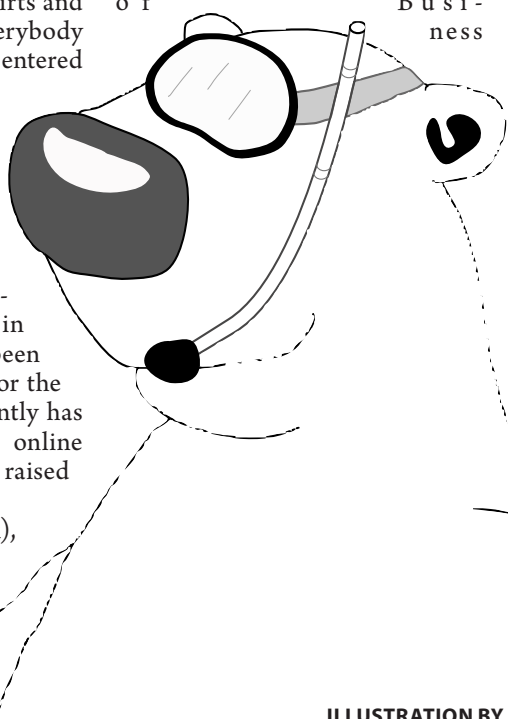
"You can register the day of, but we encourage people to register online, so that way, we have the correct amount of t-shirts and prizes," Kuusisto said. "Everybody who registers online is entered into a drawing for an iPad. So, basically, you have a one in 1,000 chance of winning an iPad."

Participants—who can join as part of a group or individually—are asked to raise a minimum of \$75 to take a dip in the icy waters. UMD has been a big part of fundraising for the Duluth Plunge, and currently has 123 plungers registered online who have collectively raised \$10,906 for the cause.

"Kendra (Eisenschenk), who's at UMD, has been helping us out with Plunge tables around the school and at hockey

games, stuff like that," Kuusisto said.

Many students have been actively working to set up teams, with 17 UMD teams registered to date. Teams include the Alumni Association, Labovitz School of Business



and Economics, the Athletic Training Program, Hockey Cheerleading, Synchronized Skating, and numerous sororities and fraternities.

"Every year it always makes us a little nervous," Kuusisto said. "Like last year, we had over 1,000 plunges and currently today, I mean we're days away, but we have 774. So we're like, 'Crap, we don't even have over 1,000 plungers.'"

The Plunge, which is presented by Minnesota Law Enforcement, has always received a tremendous amount of support from UMD.

"There are a lot of procrastinators out there, and people who don't know what to do," Kuusisto said. "We're on the radio and TV everyday, pretty much until the Plunge, telling people it's important to register online and get those numbers up."

This year UMD is once again competing against St. Cloud State University for the most funds raised.

Kuusisto admits he will not be participating in the Plunge this year.

"This will be about the third year I have not," Kuusisto said. "Just because of my active role, it's hard to get in there and then do everything when you're freezing afterwards. I take care of the site, so I'm not plunging and standing in the freezing cold all day."

If you are interested in taking the plunge you can register at www.plungemn.org.

"When you register online, you create your own website page," Kuusisto said. "It's super easy and (the website) walks you through it. Then you can email or post to Facebook your link. People click on that link, it says 'donate to me,' and you could do a credit card right there. Or, they can give you cash and you would give that when you check in."

UMD will have two shuttle buses that will be running participants and spectators down to Canal Park from the Kirby Bus Hub the day of the event from noon until 5:30 p.m.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOE FRASER