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WKU film students turn Kuegel farm into movie set

By Don Wilkins Messenger-Inquirer
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Director Johnna Kuegel right, talks with actors Shane Beckham, left, and Aila Marii before filming a scene of "Grow up, June!" in a barn Monday at the Kuegel farm on Old Lyddane Bridge Road.

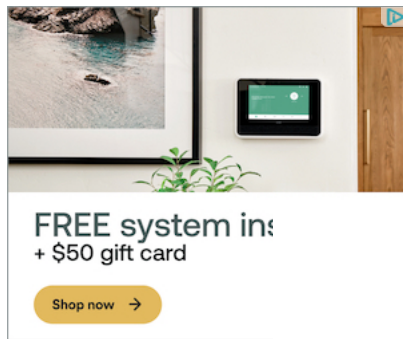
Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | awarren@messenger-inquirer.com

The Daviess County farm of John and Leigh Ann Kuegel was turned into a movie set to allow a small crew of Western Kentucky University film students shoot a movie over four days.

It was the Kuegels' daughter, Johnna, directing the movie titled "Grow Up, June!"

Johnna Kuegel, 24, wrote the fictional comedy as part of her senior thesis.

The movie, she said, is based around an idea she had about her family's former dairy business.



"Our family sold the dairy in January 2020, and the day before the sale, I came down to the barn and there was one little calf left; it was like the purest moment ever. So the movie is inspired by what would the last cow do and what would the brother and sister who are left behind do?"

Shooting began on Friday and ended Monday evening.

Hayley Vaughn, a WKU student from Evansville who served as the producer of the film, said the crew of about 15 spent 13 hours each day filming.

"On the producing side, a lot of my work gets done in the preproduction," Vaughn said. "I have to handle getting the location and handle getting all the paperwork signed so we're cleared to shoot once we get here."

WKU's film department loans out the state-of-the-art equipment to allow students to make the best movies possible. The film department also just received a new van to help haul the production equipment to locations.

"The camera we're shooting on is used in Marvel movies," Vaughn said. "The lights we're using are industry-grade equipment; it's thousands of dollars. It's great and unique that we have a film program in Kentucky that allows us to do this. We're getting to tell a story about a farm in Kentucky."

Johnna Kuegel didn't initially enroll in WKU's film program after graduating high school in 2017. She started at the University of Kentucky to major in ag education but decided that wasn't a career path for her.

"I realized that wasn't for me; I was there about three semesters," she said.

Although there is the art side to making movies, Johnna Kuegel, who wants to eventually have a career in editing movies, said there's also the trade element that's appealing.

"I sometimes feel like we're in a trade school because we're learning how to do things like camera and sound," she said. "... And then you get into directing. You kind of get to try each thing in our program. It's on production overall so we have to do each of these positions at least twice."

Throughout their four years, the film students have production cycles of mostly movie shorts that range between three to eight minutes in length. The senior thesis is the longest at around 12 minutes.

"It's hard because I talk a lot, so I tend to write too much dialogue," said Johnna Kuegel about the challenge of keeping a time limit.

Once Johnna Kuegel's film is edited for viewing, it will be shown in April with other student films as part of a larger viewing event at WKU.

She said her family has been supportive of career change, and that shooting a film on the family farm has meant a lot to her.

"It's been fun for them to see what we do and all these people I talk about," she said. "... It's also nice because you have to ask people, 'Hey, can I film at your house or on your property?'" and that's a lot to ask of somebody. With it being my family, they're pretty OK with us doing whatever and they're not going to kick us off."

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