

'Liberty of Jewels' brings film crew to Gallup

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Gallup citizens are accustomed to having movies filmed in their town. Popular movies like “Superman” (1978), “Natural Born Killers” (1994), and “The Grapes of Wrath” (1940) have all brought movie crews to the small town of Gallup.

Back in February, another film crew spent a weekend in downtown Gallup.

“Liberty of Jewels” is a short film about a struggling Navajo father who works in Gallup as a clerk for a trading post.

The film was directed by Keanu Jones, a member of the Navajo Nation.

“‘Liberty of Jewels’ is about a financially strained Navajo father who’s trying everything that he can to take care of his family,” Jones explained in an interview with the *Sun*.

Jones received a fellowship at the Sundance Native Filmmaker Lab to help him create the film. The fellowship came after Jones graduated from the Navajo Technical University in 2020 with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts.

According to the Sundance website, the film “unveils the bitter reality of the Native American jewelry markets in the surrounding border-towns.”

Right now, the film is still in the editing process, but Jones said he hopes to finish editing by June or July of this year. Then he’ll be able to enter it into international and national film festivals, including Sundance, which has a submission deadline for 2023 coming up in the fall.

When asked why he chose Gallup as the setting for his short film, Jones spoke about the history of the city and the Navajo people’s relationship to it.

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“I realized Gallup is the story,” Jones said. “Gallup is the place to tell that story because it has so many kinds of layers in its history, and tension between Native communities and things like that [...].”

Locals will recognize the film’s background; it was shot on Coal Avenue and First and Second Streets. The owners of Yazzie’s Indian Art let Jones use their store as a setting for the film.

Jones also said he chose Gallup as the setting for his project because “it’s not some fictional place.”

The main character in “Liberty of Jewels” is played by Ernest Tsosie. Tsosie said one of the main reasons he wanted to be in the film was because of the importance of the father/daughter relationship featured in it.

Tsosie said one of his favorite things about being an actor is getting to watch what the film crew does.

“For me, [the thing] I enjoy about filming is just watching the crew working as one unit,” Tsosie said. “I’m always in awe, even with just a small crew like what we had, just with how efficiently they work together. That really inspires me as an actor to do the best job I can because they’re really putting in the hours and the time to make a shot look just right.”

Jones explained one of the challenges of filming with a small crew and a small budget.

“...[Being] a very small-budgeted film with limited resources you just really have to put yourself out there a little bit and put yourself in some uncomfortable situations talking with people,” Jones said.

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In 2015, Jones was recognized at the Student White House Film Festival. In 2018, he was recognized for his short film at the Navajo Film Festival. “Liberty of Jewels” is his sixth short film.

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