

From L.A. To Loma

Hollywood films in Nebraska town

By Brian Sharp
Senior Reporter

The West never died in Loma, Connie Hannah said. It's just been put to sleep for a while.

Hannah, a resident of the small Nebraska town about 30 miles northwest of Lincoln, said the only business in the town of 24 people was the bar, and the nights used to get kind of rowdy.

"They closed the bar now, and it's quiet, quiet," Hannah said.

The town was silenced when Loma became the movie set of "To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar."

Lifestyles in the small town have changed since the film crews showed up, she said.

Filming began Aug. 4 and is expected to continue for another six to eight weeks. The crews are working generally from 7 a.m. until dark, Hannah said. One night, filming ran until the twilight hours of the following morning, she said.

During that time, production officials want complete silence.

"They want it quiet on the set," she said. "They don't want people wandering around. They let me know when to go out and when not to go."

Hannah said she felt somewhat isolated in her own home.

Bruce Cohen, the movie's executive producer, said the locals always were welcome to watch filming, but it took a while to explain what quiet meant.

"I need it quiet," he said. "I mean really quiet. You take a step in the gravel 50 to 100 feet down the road and you hear it. Our mikes pick it up. The dogs can't even bark."

Although silence is required, and two-thirds of the town is shut down during filming, most people are excited that the movie is being shot in their hometown, Hannah said.

Film producer G. Mac Brown said Loma was a perfect place.

"It's a place where, as our director says, you could stand in high heels in the center of town and have no place to go," Brown said. "You're kind of stuck there, and you know you're stuck there. That's what led us to Loma."

The movie stars Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze and John Leguizamo as drag queens who are making a cross-country trip from New York. They carry with them an autographed photo of celebrity Julie Newmar as a good-luck charm. But when their car breaks down somewhere in the Midwest, they're totally lost, Cohen said.

"They don't know where they are," he said. "At one point in the movie, they think they're in West Virginia, and the sheriff informs them they're a long way from West Virginia."

Even though filming has been going on for several weeks, Wynn Thomas, production designer, said that on

the weekends a nonstop tour went through the little town — a nonstop, unguided tour, he said.

"That street has been one of the most photographed sets I've ever seen," Thomas said. "Every farmer, every local seems to have their own video camera."

Production officials said that on weekdays, they closed the city off. No one gets into town without a pass.

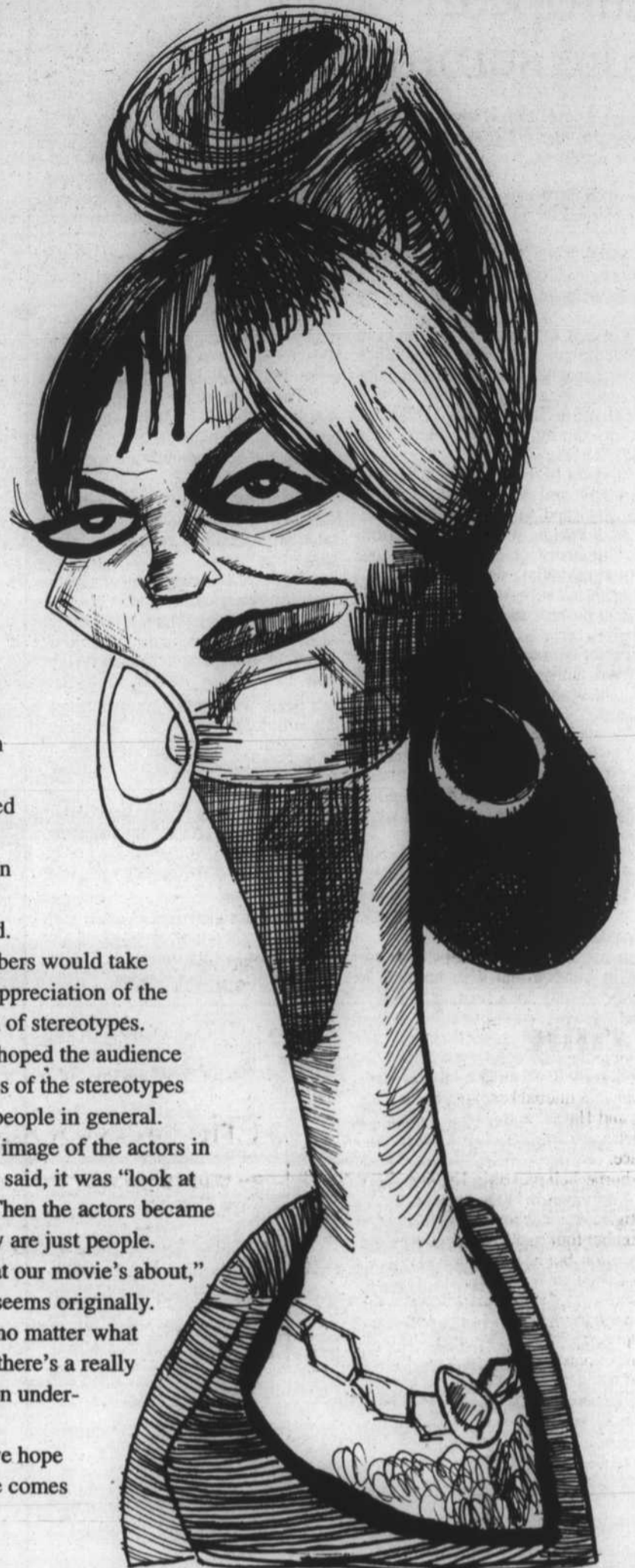
After filming is finished in Loma, the crew will move the set into and around Lincoln for two weeks before it packs up and goes home, Cohen said.

Cohen said crew members would take home with them not only an appreciation of the Midwest but also a realization of stereotypes. Like the crew, Cohen said he hoped the audience would take home an awareness of the stereotypes they had of the Midwest and people in general.

Cohen said the crew's image of the actors in drag had changed. At first, he said, it was "look at those men playing women." Then the actors became women, he said, and now they are just people.

"In the end, that's what our movie's about," he said, "that nothing is as it seems originally. You're going to find out that no matter what you think of (people) at first, there's a really fabulous and wonderful person underneath."

"That's the message we hope comes across when our movie comes out next spring"



James Mehling/DN



Gerik Parmole/DN



ETV reporters interview Connie Hannah, a Loma resident, recently during a press day at the set of "To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar." The movie, which stars Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze and John Leguizamo, is being filmed in Loma, Lincoln and Omaha.