

# MOVIE MAKER

THE ART AND BUSINESS OF MAKING MOVIES

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## Greg Chwerchak Sends His *Greetings From the Shore*

by Jessica Wall



Director Greg Chwerchak's first feature film "grew out of a sunset in Malibu" but is without a doubt a love song to New Jersey. *Greetings From the Shore*, an independent film that's been winning numerous festival awards and capturing the hearts of audience members wherever it's screened, is in select theaters now and its creators couldn't be more excited. "Greetings has been a labor of love for a lot of people and it's deeply satisfying to put something like that out in the world," Chwerchak explains.

The coming-of-age tale, written by Chwerchak and Gabrielle Berberich, tells the story of bright-eyed Jenny (Kim Shaw) who spends her last summer before college at the Jersey Shore where she's hired at a local yacht club to teach English to a group of very uncooperative waiters. Recovering from the recent death of her father, Jenny befriends a local mechanic (Paul Sorvino) and falls in love with a mysterious sailor (David Fumero), while the yacht club's hidden world floats to the surface upon the return of the power-hungry Commodore (Jay O. Sanders).

Before the movie's theatrical release Chwerchak spoke with *MM* about releasing his first feature and why he wants the world to know how beautiful New Jersey really is.

**Jessica Wall (MM):** From relative newcomer Kim Shaw to prolific long-time actor Paul Sorvino (*Goodfellas*, *Romeo + Juliet*), the cast of *Greetings From the Shore* is made up of actors with a variety of acting backgrounds. What was it like directing a cast with such a wide range of experience? How did their different backgrounds affect the atmosphere on set?

**Greg Chwerchak (GC):** The actors in the film are amazing and I can't sing their praises enough. From the moment we arrived on location at the Jersey Shore, the cast was one big family. The four actors who play the foreigners, for example, had never met before, yet all agreed to share a house at the Shore. They're playing sailors who've been on boats together for years and their characters should know each other inside and out. So the actors moved in together. They cooked meals together, played poker, learned to crab, drank excessively and kicked a soccer ball nonstop. By the time we began filming, their rivalries

and affections were second nature. It was amazing. It was like watching four men who'd spent their entire lives together. I think that, in a nutshell, is what makes directing actors in an independent feature different than anything else. No actor shows up to an indie film set for a paycheck; they're there because they love it, because they relish working with other actors who live and breathe the process. I was extremely fortunate to have such a great ensemble for my first feature. The casting was perfect. Most days I just got to show up on set and watch pros do what they do best.

**MM: You're a New Jersey native and Gabrielle Berberich based the story on her own experiences at the Jersey Shore. What was it like to film at a location so close to both of your hearts?**

**GC:** The Jersey Shore was the first character in the screenplay. Literally. Before Gabrielle and I ever wrote one word of the script, we took a trip to Lavallette, the coastal town where Gabrielle spent every summer growing up. We walked around and talked to locals and began to cobble together all these wonderful moments that had happened to Gabrielle in this town. So before there was ever a "Jenny" or a "Benicio" or a "Commodore," there was the Jersey Shore. It's a fascinating place—almost timeless. Families return to rent houses on the same streets in the same towns for generations. Kids grow up with their school friends and their shore friends. It's hard to put in words, which is maybe why we put it in pictures. New Jersey has taken its knocks over the years, so Gabrielle and I wanted to make a film that was a tribute to the New Jersey that we knew. In shooting, then, there was a pressure. We didn't want to let down all the Jersey folks that shared our feelings for the shore.