



## ***Greetings from the Shore* celebrates filmmaker's Jersey roots**

***by Vicki Hyman/The Star-Ledger***  
**Posted on September 11, 2008**

"Greetings from the Shore," an indie film set in Lavallette and produced by Hackettstown native Gabrielle Berberich, lingers on gilded sunsets, the twinkling promise of the boardwalk on a summer night, the uncomplicated glory of a tray of rainbow-colored golf balls. It's the rare film not only set in New Jersey but seen from the eye of someone not trying to escape it.

As Berberich crisscrossed the country over the last year, making the rounds of film festivals, she kept hearing the same question: "I know it's about the Jersey Shore, but where did you actually film it?"



Saed Hindash/The Star-Ledger Gabrielle Berberich, writer and producer of the indie feature, "Greetings from the Shore." photographed at the Lavallette Yacht Club, where much of her movie was shot.

Showing off her native state is exactly why Berberich and her co-writer and director, fellow Jersey native Greg Chwerchak, decided to make "Greetings from the Shore," a coming-of-age film about the dreamers and schemers who call the Jersey Shore their home, at least for the summer. The film reaches theaters Friday.

"We're just tired of getting made fun of for being from New Jersey," Berberich says. "We wanted to avenge the Garden State."

Tom Walls, who owns the Bayside Cafe in Lavallette, was mayor when Berberich and Chwerchak came calling in 2006 with plans to shoot on location. When it comes to New Jersey, he says, "people have this 'riding down the Turnpike' view or 'Sopranos' view. I enjoyed that show, but it doesn't exactly show how nice things are all the time.

"It didn't take much to read into the script that this was a love letter to Lavallette."

Much of the story comes from Berberich's own life. After losing her father, a scrappy, small-town beauty named Jenny Chambers (played by newcomer Kim Shaw) decides to spend the summer before college waitressing in Lavallette, where her family used to vacation. (In the film, the family snapshot Jenny contemplates is of Berberich as a child with her father, Leo, who died of cancer at 51.) Jenny lands a job at the Lavallette Yacht Club teaching "restaurant English" to the busboys, foreigners working on student visas. Berberich says she wanted to give a voice to the background players who keep a tourist town ticking.

There's also a summer romance and a surrogate father (played by Paul Sorvino) who are modeled on Berberich's own.

Berberich, the youngest of six children, says she got her first taste of show biz while assisting a professor at Marymount Manhattan College on a biography of "Twilight Zone" creator Rod Serling. The professor was hearing-impaired, and Berberich helped conduct interviews.

She became a freelance writer and publicist, and after relocating to Los Angeles, moved into casting and producing theater, music videos and film.

Several years ago, she met Chwerchak, a Jersey-born but Texas-bred writer, and they collaborated on a number of projects, including a short whodunit called "The Quarry," set in rural New Jersey.

This is Berberich's first feature film as a writer and producer.

Berberich's devotion to New Jersey is manifest right down to the name of her production company: Jenny Jump Pictures, after the state forest near her Warren County hometown. Her follow-up to "Greetings" will be a romantic comedy set in Warren and Hunterdon counties, about star-crossed lovers whose fathers both believe they are the Lindbergh baby. (A "Once Upon a Time in New Jersey"-type trilogy is in the cards.)

When Berberich was growing up, her father worked in printing, her mother was a housekeeper, and the Shore was an affordable vacation destination. They rented a tiny bungalow in Lavallette, and her father commuted during the week.

"I thought it was the fanciest place on Earth," Berberich says. The sleepy Shore town has changed over the years. The prices of those tiny bungalows have skyrocketed -- Berberich, who splits her time among New York, Hackettstown and Los Angeles, paid a tidy sum for her own Lavallette beach house in 2005 -- but the small-town vibe has been preserved.

The residents turned out to be generous with their advice and insider knowledge. The filmmakers initially wanted to shoot in late spring, but Walls convinced them September and October would guarantee nicer weather and warmer ocean water.

Barnacle Bill's Mini-Golf had already closed for the season by the time the filming started, but owners Bill and Jo Ann Petruzel let them tend to the landscaping and agreed not to take down the giant 500-pound statue of Barnacle Bill as long as the crew helped them with it later.

Walt and Tami Kosenski, whose family runs the town's Tradewinds Motor Lodge, lent their bayside home for a party scene for the summering rich kids. (His house looks fancier on film, Kosenski insists.)

"We were really impressed by them," Kosenski says. "By the end of the film, we had a sense that we were really part of it."