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Local filmmaker looks to friends to produce movie

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DOWNTOWN When noted character actor and Santa Monica local Louis Lombardi finally got around to directing the independent film

“Doughboys” he found that the process was akin to making a major Hollywood production with one exception: some things in life are free. As Lombardi, best known for his parts on HBO’s “The Sopranos” and the film “The Usual Suspects,” moved along with filming in his hometown of The Bronx, a funny thing happened. Unlike most major productions, he discovered a neighborhood willing to lend him their homes, cars and even bakeries.

The film’s screenplay, which Lombardi wrote a dozen years ago, originally called for a pizzeria to be the centerpiece of the film. But when he happened upon a quirky bakery in the heart of the gritty part of New York City he fell in love.

“When I first went to the bakery, I said this is a great setting,” he said. “I decided right there that I should change the script to include the bakery.”

When he first approached the owners of the bakery he wasn’t sure how it would go over. Would they charge him an arm and a leg? Would they tell him they weren’t interested? No.

He found an ownership that was happy to give him access to the place while it was being prepared for a major renovation. He just so happened to need the place during August, which was coincidentally the same month the work was slated to occur.

Just like that, Lombardi had a location that would ultimately become one of the main stars of the film.

That was just the start of the giving spirit the new filmmaker found in his old neighborhood. “Everybody kept coming along to help us,” he said. “The police department, the fire department.

“It couldn’t have been more perfect.”

He attributes much of the success of the film, which has been available on DVD since November, to the generosity of others.

“It was a little movie,” he said. “We shot it for nothing. Everybody helped us, giving us stuff. It turned out to be way bigger than it is.”

While Lombardi, who co-stars in the upcoming film “The Spirit,” featuring Samuel L. Jackson, could have never guessed that he would get so much for free, he did know that there was a certain something that moved him to make The Bronx the setting for his movie. He wanted to infuse “Doughboys” with the essence of the borough. The mom-and-pop shops, the kids playing in the street all helped set the stage for a film he considers a throwback to a simpler time.

“There are no little spots out here [in L.A.],” he said. “In my neighborhood [the Bronx] there are five bakeries, eight pizzerias.

“That’s what the movie is all about: Neighborhoods changing, things changing. The mom-and-pops are going out of business and becoming supermarkets.”

The plot centers on a pair of brothers who run a neighborhood bakery. While both are devoted to the family business, one brother has a gambling problem that threatens their livelihood. The work is most certainly a drama, but Lombardi manages to inject enough humor into the screenplay to round it out.

“It is just a straight story about family that happens to be funny,” he said.

Staying with the “keeping it in the family theme,” even the cast was comprised of many of Lombardi’s friends in the entertainment industry. One such friend, Andrew Keegan, a Venice resident, heard Lombardi discuss the film when it was in its early stages. The part of Sally Boy appealed to Keegan and he jumped at the chance to play him once Lombardi began casting the film.

“I was just present to that information,” Keegan said. “I harassed him for the part.” Keegan said that personal relationships often play a part in working on such a smallscale project.

“You have to keep it close when you’re doing a small, independent film,” he said. “Across the board there are differences [between major productions and small films]. When you’re sacrificing financially, a lot of things go out the window as far as conveniences are concerned. You tend to focus on the work more.

“The end result is a product made with blood, sweat and tears.” daniela@smdp.com