



Tom Cruise strikes an iconic pose as rocker Stacee Jaxx in New Line Cinema's '80s musical *Rock of Ages*, a Warner Bros. June 15 release.

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WE BUILT THIS CITY

How South Florida went Hollywood for *Rock of Ages*

BY ELIZABETH RAHE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID JAMES

Tom Cruise channels Axl Rose as aging rocker Stacee Jaxx. Julianne Hough turns exotic dancer as girl-led-astray Sherrie Christian. Alec Baldwin raises hippie hair and leopard print to high camp as club owner Dennis Dupree. But the most striking makeover in the film adaptation of the '80s hair-band musical *Rock of Ages* is South Florida's portrayal of Southern California.

When the New Line Cinema/Warner Bros. release debuts June 15, moviegoers will see what South Floridians glimpsed during filming last summer: North Miami Avenue near the MacArthur Causeway as 1980s-era Sunset Strip, the Hollywood Broadwalk as Venice Beach and north Broward's Monarch Hill landfill as the backdrop for the famous Hollywood Hills Hollywood sign.

Audiences will watch Cruise with his movie band, Arsenal, rocking Def Leppard's *Pour Some Sugar on Me* at Revolution Live in Fort Lauderdale and Bon Jovi's *Wanted Dead or Alive* at Hard Rock Live in Hollywood.

Through movie magic, these and other area locations serve as backdrops for the story of a small-town girl (Hough, *Footloose*) and city boy (Mexican singer/actor Diego Boneta) pursuing their Hollywood dreams. It's set to the tune of '80s rock anthems, which the moralistic mayor's wife (Catherine Zeta-Jones, *Chicago*) attempts to silence.

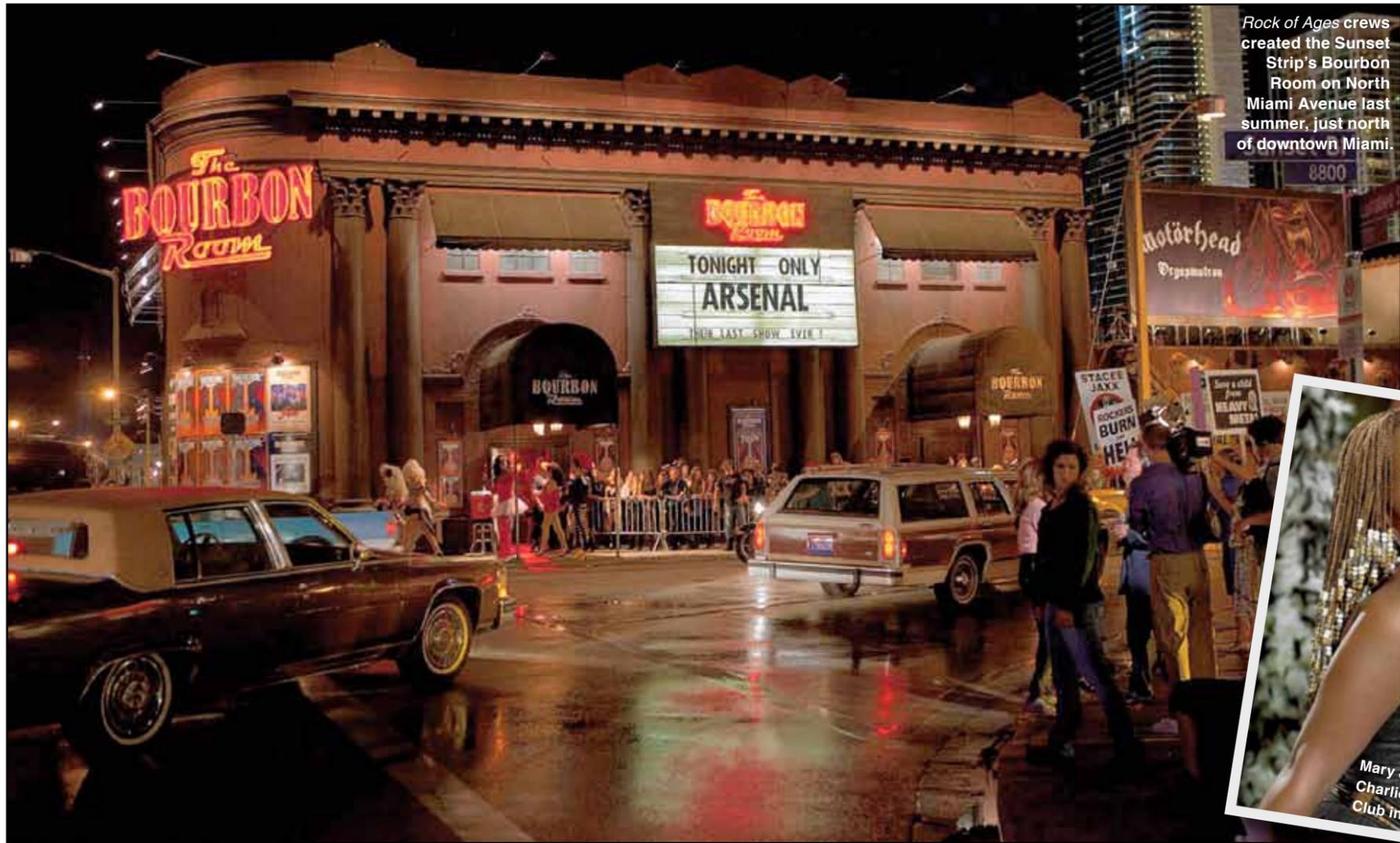
In honor of South Florida's close-up, we tracked down some of the people who helped create *Rock of Ages* in our backyard, collecting a few back-lot back stories along the way.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

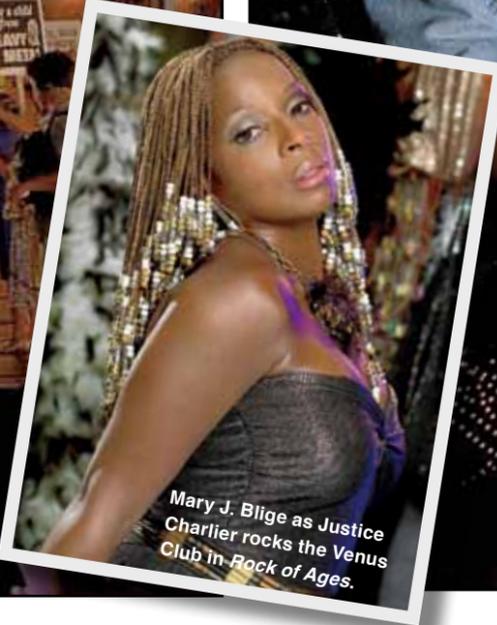
Rock of Ages' Sunset Strip set might well have landed in North Carolina, Australia or even Budapest, Hungary. It all came down to inventive locations, incentive dollars and palm trees – with an assist from South Florida hospitality.

With Hollywood, Calif., ruled out for financial and logistical reasons, producer Garrett Grant began scouting locations around the globe. When the Florida Legislature





Rock of Ages crews created the Sunset Strip's Bourbon Room on North Miami Avenue last summer, just north of downtown Miami.



Mary J. Blige as Justice Charlier rocks the Venus Club in *Rock of Ages*.



Julianne Hough as Sherrie Christian and Diego Boneta as Drew Boley share a tender moment atop Monarch Hill landfill, subbing for the Hollywood Hills.

passed the film tax incentives in spring 2010, Miami-Dade and Broward counties came into the mix. Then it was a matter of finding locations that would fit the budget and director Adam Shankman's (*Hairspray*) creative vision.

The location team found their site for a condensed version of Sunset Strip on North Miami Avenue just north of MacArthur Causeway in Miami. "All we'd have to do is paint and apply some signage and awnings and make it look like it was 1987 all over again," Grant says, adding that the Hollywood Hills would be added digitally. "In come [period] cars and extras, and you would never know that we're not on Sunset Strip."

The filmmakers needed a hilltop site to film a romantic scene between the two love interests at the base of the Hollywood sign. "When they told us about the landfill location, we just laughed," Grant says of the 200-foot-tall disposal site near Coconut Creek. "But it worked out perfectly. We filmed at night, and for working at a dump, it was pretty decent working conditions."

With Hollywood's Broadwalk subbing for Venice Beach, the team had its major outdoor locations set, and South Florida got the part.

The Monarch Hill landfill location "worked out perfectly. We filmed at night, and for working at a dump, it was pretty decent working conditions."

— Garrett Grant, *Rock of Ages* producer

The area offered the look of Southern California — sunshine, palm trees, stucco buildings — the incentives made it financially attractive, and it was an appealing locale for the filmmakers and the A-list cast.

"The minute you say, 'Hey guys, you want to come down to South Beach for a few weeks?' they're in," Grant says.

SUNSET STRIP SOUTHEAST

By summer 2011 artfully constructed facades of The Bourbon Room, Tower Records, The Roxy, Frederick's of Hollywood and other Sunset Strip standards had set the stage for the street scenes on North Miami Avenue. Sherrie could arrive by bus from Kansas singing Night Ranger's *Sister Christian*. Stacey Jaxx could make his motorcycle entrance flanked by angry rockers and anti-rock crusaders alternately singing Twisted Sister's *We're Not Gonna Take It* and Starship's *We Built This City*.

Ice Palace Film Studios at 1400 N. Miami Ave. was base camp for the production, providing space for studio shoots, hair, makeup and wardrobe, song-and-dance training, set construction and catering. It was also the scene of a 1 a.m. rock concert for the performers and crew, featuring a string of '80s

artists who may have cameos in the film — Sebastian Bach of Skid Row, Nuno Bettencourt of Extreme, Joel Hoekstra of Night Ranger, Kevin Cronin of REO Speedwagon and Debbie Gibson.

Ice Palace owner Eugene Rodriguez, who has experience primarily with action films, was impressed by the operation. "It was really a big production with all the layers and layers it takes to achieve a period musical," he says. "I thought it ran smoothly, considering how many moving parts it had."

To accommodate the schedules of the big-name cast, the recreated Sunset Strip set had to be available over several months for eight to 10 nights of filming. Location manager Sam Tedesco oversaw myriad details to pull off the shoots, including negotiating with the merchants and government officials and securing the set.

"When we shot it was a total street closure, which meant that a detour had to be set up by a barricade company over a 12-14 block area," says Tedesco, who had used the area for the 2003 film *2 Fast 2 Furious*. Private contractors had to restripe North Miami Avenue each night, changing it from a one-way to a two-way street for filming. Everything had to be returned to normal before rush hour the next morning, including placing temporary banners on the actual businesses so customers could find them.

"Had it not been for the merchants on Miami Avenue being willing to work with us, we wouldn't have been able to do this. They went out of their way to work with us," says Tedesco, a longtime resident of Pompano Beach who recently moved to the Los Angeles area.

The filming was a positive experience for Albert Puebla of ABC Restaurant Supplies & Equipment at 1345 N. Miami Ave., which became Tower Records for the filming. "I thought it helped business," Puebla says.

He worked several nights during the filming, even chatted with actor Russell Brand (*Arthur*), who plays Bourbon Room manager Lonny Barnett. "He's a pretty cool guy," Puebla says.

The excitement of watching the filming process faded quickly, however. "After the first night it was one of the most boring things, seeing Tom Cruise ride his motorcycle back and forth on the block like 1,000 times. And that song, *We're Not Gonna Take It*. I was so traumatized by that song by the end of it," Puebla says.

Now Tower Records is gone, and thanks to cleanup crews and fresh paint, ABC Restaurant is back to normal — except for a sign painted of "some old dude," which Puebla kept as a souvenir. Would he lend the shop to movie crews again?

"Absolutely," he says.

ROCK OF AGES REVOLUTION

Bras still hang like bawdy stalactites above the bar at Revolution Live, remnants of the set decoration that transformed the downtown Fort Lauderdale concert venue into the *Rock of Ages* Bourbon Room interior. Revolution closed last June as swarms of actors, musicians, crew members and extras turned the club — and the entire block in Fort Lauderdale's Himmarshee district — into a closed movie set.

Russell Brand, Julianne Hough, Diego Boneta and Alec Baldwin in a Bourbon Room interior scene from *Rock of Ages*, shot in Fort Lauderdale's Revolution Live.



Revolution Live kept a few souvenirs of the filming, including this wall collage.

ELIZABETH RAHE

“They had a 350-person crew, and some days there were 500 extras. It was amazing to see how it all comes together,” says club owner Jeff John.

It took three weeks to prepare Revolution for about a month of shooting – to dress the stage, turn the VIP room into the bar owner’s office, plaster a wall with ’80s posters, paint and furnish the green room, rig the lighting and filming equipment, even hook up silent air conditioners that would not interfere with the sound.

John has hosted scores of big-name acts at Revolution Live – including Katy Perry, who visited her then-husband, Russell Brand, on set. Still, he was struck by the dramatic effects created through the movie-making process, including the energy generated when Cruise as Stacey Jaxx and his band played to a crowd of extras cheering from Revolution’s pit. Over and above the production values, he has high praise for Cruise, who performed some gymnastic moves such as jumping over railings and making an entrance riding a keg. “He really puts in the time. He’s not Tom Cruise during the filming. He’s Stacey Jaxx. He lives it.”

John enjoyed the interplay between Cruise and Shankman. “They were screaming at each other back and forth in a joking and playful manner,” he says, adding that the director kept the process light and fun but also very professional.

Hough’s performance brought a transcendent quality to Revolution Live. “She was doing a solo thing one night ... That’s when you could tell there was just a different mist in the air. To see

that, it was pretty amazing,” John says.

“She was an absolute sweetheart, very friendly, very personable. You could tell she was a very happy individual,” he adds.

Brand was also engaging on set, often joking and interacting with the extras. He and Baldwin (*30 Rock*) seem to have hit it off, according to Shankman, who told *The Hollywood Reporter* they were like Tracy and Hepburn. “They were so giddy, and they did everything together.”

Revolution Live is the backdrop for the pair in the movie trailer, with Baldwin’s Dennis Dupree serving up this slice of cheese: “This place is about to become a sea of sweat, ear-shattering music and puke.”

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AMAZING PACE

Julianne Hough dances through a multifaceted career

Yellow caution tape held the paparazzi back, but their telephoto lenses zeroed in on Julianne Hough splashing off Hollywood Beach in a purple bikini. Sure, her *Rock of Ages* co-star, Mexican singer/actor Diego Boneta, was there, embracing her in the surf for the movie scene. But the focus – not surprisingly – was on Hough and her dancer-perfect form.

During *Rock of Ages* filming last summer, photographers seemed to follow her everywhere – relaxing with friends by the pool, running on the beach with her trainer, riding a WaveRunner with her boyfriend, producer and *American Idol* host Ryan Seacrest.

Not that we were looking.

The camera loves blond, blue-eyed Hough, but the 23-year-old backs her cover-girl looks with accomplishments in dance, singing and acting. She garnered her first headlines in 2007, winning *Dancing with the Stars* twice, with speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno and IndyCar champion Helio Castroneves.

Next she turned to country music, releasing a self-titled album and taking the Top New Artist award at the 2009 Academy of Country Music Awards. Her 2010 single, *Is That So Wrong*, spawned a video featuring a racy striptease.

Hough’s current focus seems to be on film. In the past several years she has gone from playing a seductive burlesque performer (*Burlesque*) to a wayward preacher’s daughter (*Footloose*) to a small town dreamer turned exotic dancer (*Rock of Ages*).

She has described the South Florida filming of the musical as fun, crazy, totally unpredictable. “Everyday would be like, ‘Wait – we have a monkey on set? Wait – we have prostitutes? Wait we have...what is going on?...It was fantastic,” she told *Access Hollywood*.

Her latest project is an untitled Diablo Cody film in which she plays a young evangelical woman who gets burned in a plane crash, loses her faith and heads for Las Vegas to experience life on the wild side (expected in 2013).

Does anyone else detect a running theme here?

Perhaps her fall-from-grace role choices are in reaction to her conservative roots.

She was born in Sandy, Utah, the youngest of five children in a Mormon family with a legacy of ballroom dancing. Her brother, Derek Hough, 26, is a three-time *Dancing with the Stars* winner. Their father, Bruce R. Hough, is a business executive, blogger and national Republican committeeman from Utah. After *Burlesque* Julianne expressed concern about his possible reaction to her scanty wardrobe in the film.

From all appearances, however, Hough confines her wild living to the big screen. She has the image of a hard-working artist who stays out of trouble.

One of her Twitter posts last June speaks to her self-image: “LOVE Reese Witherspoon!!!! Good Girls do exist and CAN make it in “Hollywood”! [Thanks] for being a great idol! And one of mine!”

Her tweets are filled with messages about family and friends, her work and her dogs. A YouTube video from her trailer on the *Rock of Ages* set reveals yet another talent – training her Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Lexi and Harley, with warmth, discipline and grace.

These traits seem to have worked quite well for their master so far.

—Elizabeth Rahe



Julianne Hough performs during the CMA Music Festival



Watch videos featuring Julianne Hough at cityandshore.com

PHOTOS: RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES) AND S. BUKLEY

DREAM DRUM GIG

Daniel Wills read about online auditions for musicians on Facebook, sent in a video of himself playing lead guitar, and ended up playing drums with Cruise and the *Rock of Ages* band, Arsenal.

"It was kind of like a dream. When I sent in that video, I never thought I would hear from them," says Wills, whose father, Rick Wills, played bass with Foreigner through the '80s. "It was like the part was written for me. I watched my dad do this for 25 years."

He rehearsed with other band members for a few days, and then with Cruise for a day, before shooting concert scenes in Revolution Live and Hard Rock Live at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood.

"Tom was an amazing man to work with, totally focused and driven. He took working alongside musicians seriously, and he moved and acted so much like a true rock star," says Wills, a sound engineer and producer who recently opened The Armory Studios in Miami's Wynwood Arts District.

For the Hard Rock Live performance, director Shankman had

issued a call for extras to show up at Sun Life Stadium in all-black '80s garb, with big hair and makeup for a "head-banging concert party." Producers transported several thousand extras from the stadium to Hard Rock in school buses for the filming of a major Jaxx/Arsenal concert.

From Wills' perspective behind the drum set, Shankman and his crew pulled off a true '80s rock-concert experience, complete with pyrotechnics. For the filming of Bon Jovi's *Wanted Dead or Alive*, Wills learned he was going to be replaced with a double for safety reasons.

"We went on break – Tom was having his tattoos redone or something – and I went over to the director and almost insisted that I do the part. They were really cool about it," he says. The crew sprayed him with a flame-retardant gel – "I felt like a Ghostbuster," he says – and lit the fireworks behind him. Although Wills wondered if his hair was on fire, he played on, and he has no regrets.

"They kept it real. They kept it big. They kept it rock 'n' roll," he says.

At the end of the marathon filming session, Wills stuck around with Cruise and the rest of the band to perform for the crowd of extras.

"Tom [Cruise] was... totally focused and driven. He took working alongside musicians seriously, and he moved and acted so much like a true rock star."

–Daniel Wills, *The Armory Studios, Miami*



Russell Brand and Alec Baldwin share a sweet moment on set at Boomer's entertainment park in Dania Beach.

Romance blooms between Sherrie (Julianne Hough) and Drew (Diego Boneta).



Rock of Ages director Adam Shankman takes a break from filming to walk his dogs on the Hollywood Boardwalk.

VENUS RISING

When Arthur Percy got a call about using the former Hirschfeld Theatre in Miami Beach for the *Rock of Ages* Venus Club set, he thought it was a prank by his friend, Mark Bell, producer of the *Rock of Ages* Broadway show.

"I kind of told them to go to hell," he says. Then he learned Bell had forgotten to mention that the filmmakers would be contacting him.

"I called back, and I'm like, 'Hi, I'm sorry. Let's talk for real now,'" says Percy, who had acquired the property at Castle Beach Club Condominium only two weeks before the call. He planned to renovate the former Playboy Club for a multifunction entertainment space.

The power was still off when Shankman, Grant and Tedesco scouted the location, shining their flashlights on a 15-foot pile of rubble in the middle of the dramatic multilevel room. "We looked at [production designer Jon Hutman] and said, 'How are you going to do this?'" Grant recalls. "He said, 'Trust me, I'll make it look beautiful.'"

Indeed, the Venus Club appears as a gleaming, high-end gentleman's club in the film, complete with stage-mounted dancing poles. It's the realm of Justice Charlier (R&B singer Mary J. Blige), who offers the down-on-her-luck Sherrie a job as an exotic dancer.

After a month of set construction, about 300 people took over the Venus Club set for a week of 18- to 20-hour filming sessions.

"We had a great time. Mary [J. Blige] was a sweetheart," Percy says, adding that she praised the acoustics in the room. A few visitors also dropped by, including Hough's boyfriend, Ryan Seacrest (*American Idol*), and Tobey Maguire (*Spider-Man*), a producer on the film.

When Shankman needed extras for groups of yuppies, Japanese businessmen and dirty old men in the club, he enlisted Percy. "I got to play a dirty old man," he says, quickly adding that he's only 46.

The dance poles and the rest of the movie set are in storage now, destined for sale or charity auction. Percy's new multifunction

venue, expected to open by summer's end, is getting some screen time. (The private club area will be called The Front Desk, but the multifunction space is not yet named.)

"You can see it in the *Rock of Ages* trailer and in Gloria Estefan's new video *Hotel Nacional*," Percy says, getting in a little promotion of his own.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

Hollywood's iconic sign perched atop the landfill at Monarch Hill Renewable Energy Park – known to many as Mount Trashmore – was the most conspicuous indicator of the *Rock of Ages* presence in our midst. Drivers on Florida's Turnpike near Sample Road couldn't miss it.

"Who says we don't have mountains here?" says Noelle Stevenson, film commissioner of the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward Office of Film & Entertainment, who assisted with arrangements for filming in the county.

A construction crew built the 20-foot-tall sign, and the production

team followed to capture the romantic scene between Sherrie and Drew. "They created a mini-city on our landfill," says Dawn McCormick, Community Affairs Manager for Waste Management. The location fee funded college scholarships for four seniors at Monarch Hill High School in Coconut Creek.

The Hollywood sign came down soon after the filmmakers finished their scene – but not before McCormick arranged for a photo of the scholarship winners in front of the giant prop. Local film promoters may have wished it could remain, but the letters were not built to withstand high winds.

"It's in storage should anyone ever need it again," says Graham Winick, Miami Beach film and event production manager. "I like to think in the back of my mind – even though I have a lot of friends in Los Angeles – should The Big One ever hit, we could do all their period movies here." ●

"Who says we don't have mountains here?"

– Noelle Stevenson, *Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward Office of Film & Entertainment*

