

Film makers visit to shoot documentary



David Harry

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PORTLAND — Bob Reynolds came north to tell a story Monday morning. Michael Maglaras came north to hear it. Maglaras, co-owner of [217 Films](#), sat with Reynolds in the library on the third floor of the Masonic Temple at 415 Congress St.

"It happened in 1930 when my father came home and said he had lost his job," Reynolds began.

"What happened?" asked Maglaras, getting Reynolds to focus on specific memories of the Great Depression. Such memories are at the heart of 217's documentary film on the Works Progress Administration.

Maglaras and Reynolds are both from Connecticut, but for the sixth time, 217 was in Portland to shoot a movie.

"Its a great crew and a great place to film," Maglaras said. "We have people who can take over a funky space like this."

Planned for release in February 2015, "Enough to Live On: The Art of the WPA," will mark the 80th anniversary of the creation of the agency by President Franklin Roosevelt as part of his New Deal to fight the Depression's economic ravages.

Maglaras and co-owner Terri Templeton have made five movies about American art and artists in the early-20th century. But Maglaras said the WPA's employment of artists, musicians and writers to create public works drew special interest.

"What we've got is a spirit of 'can-do' and 'let's make it work,'" Maglaras said. "Artists are our fellow citizens and they deserve to be employed."

Maglaras's film, set in 1935, will look at how the WPA employed painters including Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock and Marsden Hartley, as well as photographer Berenice Abbott.

Reynolds, 90, is the author of a memoir titled "What a Life! Footprints in the Sands of Time." But Monday's filming was his first. His memories and the comments of Erika Doss, a history professor at the University of Notre Dame, will provide context for "Enough to Live On."

"I haven't had this much fun since I got married," Reynolds said.

He recounted how his father, a World War I veteran, lost his job, upsetting a comfortable home life that included a nanny and a fashionable 1926 Dodge with leather seats.

Reynolds also remembered going to prep school with Hollywood legend Jack Lemmon, and appearing onstage in drag opposite Lemmon because the school did not admit girls.

Some of those recollections may not make the film's final cut, but Reynolds' ease in front of the camera impressed Maglaras.

"George Clooney, eat your heart out," he said with a laugh.

Maglaras worked through a demanding schedule with help from locals Tom Eichler on sound, production assistant Andrea Nilosek, set decorator Kent Lanigan, and grip Mike Panenka. The crew was hired by 217 production manager Ramsey Tripp, to the delight of Maglaras.

"You build a rapport with people, they can read my mind," Maglaras said.

Maglaras, an insurance consultant and a trained opera singer, has also appeared in his own films. He played Hartley in the first 217 production, "Cleophas and His Own: A North Atlantic Tragedy." The 2005 film is based on an unreleased manuscript, found after Hartley's death in 1943, detailing a family tragedy in Nova Scotia.

Maglaras said the beauty of the WPA was its inclusion. For example, despite the largely segregated era, Roosevelt banned racial discrimination in the WPA's hiring of artists and writers. Today, the visual results adorn walls in post offices and other public buildings throughout the country.

"You can walk up and down Congress Street and see art in windows, but this was about paying American painters, writers musicians to participate in our society," Maglaras said.

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