

Sailing to  
**STARDOM**  
in the *Caribbean*

## IS A FAMILIAR BOAT COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU?

In the spring of 2009, movie scouts were combing the Virgin Islands, looking for 1950s-era boats as props for a new Johnny Depp flick. One of the agents gave his card to Angela Ebner, co-owner of the schooner *Patient Lady*, and when she later handed it to her husband, Michael, he tossed it in the trash. "I had to explain to him who Johnny Depp is," Ebner said.

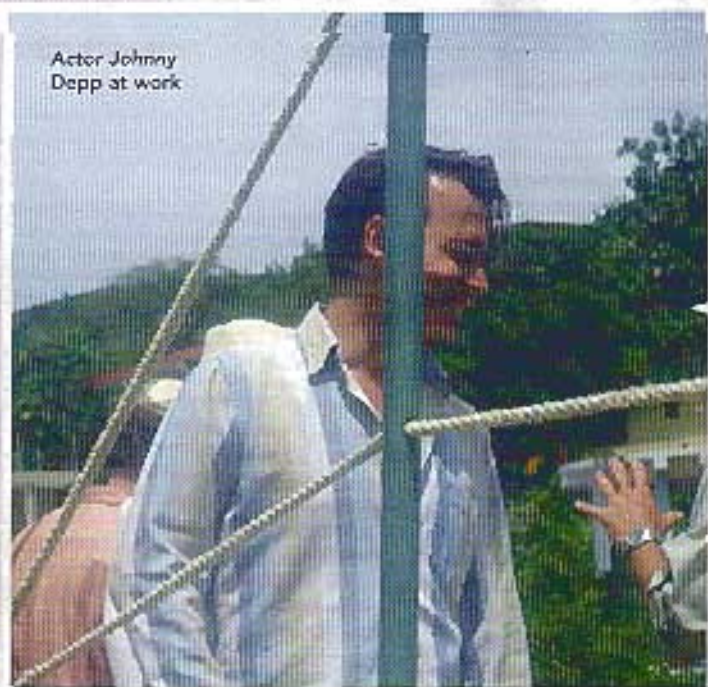
Angela heard opportunity knocking on the companionway so she retrieved the card out and made a call. *Patient Lady*, she was told, would be perfect.

Now, who wouldn't want to be in a movie with Johnny Depp? But being business-minded, Angela asked, "Are we doing this just for fun or do we get paid?" Paid, yes, including the chance to participate in an extraordinary adventure.

When Robin Clair-Pitts, owner of the Malabar schooner *Liberty*, received the same invite, she immediately called her captain, Thatcher Lord, who was in the middle of the St. Barth Bucket. His husband back to St. John, readied the boat and they headed west along with the classics *Heron* and *Hess's Desire*.

*Patient Lady*, recently launched and aptly named after more than 30 years of construction, had a harder time getting ready. She had spars but no sails so the Ebners went looking for loaners. Since St. Thomas' sail

Actor Johnny Depp at work



maker, Manfred was close to completing theirs, he burned the midnight oil to finish and they hurriedly hoisted them on. With winches affixed, and running rigging completed, they took a 90-minute test sail before heading west toward stardom on their maiden voyage.

Once in Puerto Rico at the Puerto del Rey Marina, the Ebners' original six contracted days began to stretch due to delays of weather, sea swell and movie mysticisms. Some of the crew had jobs that would not wait and were flown home, VIP style, and returned in time for the action. "It was a lot like sailing," explained Angela. "Long periods of being bored and then everything happens at once."

Shooting was done in Naguabo, a quiet little town on the southeast corner of the island. "We went to look at the harbor before the set designers touched it and when it was finished, it was amazing how much they transformed it," Angela recounted. Magically it went from ordinary to a 50s' carnival scene.

"They built all these rum shanties full of old bottles, some half full, quarter full of apple juice," said Lord. "The champagne bottles were filled with ginger ale." No detail was spared.

After a bit of waiting in Naguabo, the boat jockeys finally came to stage the yachts. Liberty, at 70 feet, was deemed to have the biggest footprint so she was anchored out. Heron and Patient Lady were moved to the concrete dock where they grounded and pounded, causing yet another delay. Since Hollywood can make Spiderman fly, they can berth a few boats—so they brought in 100 running feet of extra dock along with airbags and divers who inched the vessels in.

Once the set was completed, the yacht crews, who would be extras, headed to Roosevelt Roads where football-field-sized tents were erected for wardrobe, hair and makeup.

"There were food service trailers, stations for hair, containers full of 1950s clothes," said Ebner. She wore authentic Keds, culottes and a white shirt. "The most amazing thing was that I was paid to have my hair cut by the same person who did Johnny Depp's." Husband Michael's transformation was so remarkable that when Angela later saw photos, she didn't recognize him.

Boats get ready for their close-ups



PHOTO BY ANGELA EBNER

Clair-Pitts described her makeover. "They purified up my hair. Thatcher said I looked like Lauren Bacall." Beards were shaved but for some reason, only Lord's was spared.

On the day of shooting the Ebners were late getting to the mail. "Everyone was in costume," Angela said. "It was like going into the Twilight Zone."

Heron, the leading lady of the boats, was the actual stage for movie leads Depp and Amber Heard. "They started filming between our boats," said Angela, "and then on Heron."

Everyone agreed they were treated professionally by a stellar Hollywood crew. Clair-Pitts affirmed, "They treated the boats like stars and us with dignity." Ebner added, "The directors and producers were on our boat with great manners. They even asked permission to board."

Once it was a wrap, the 22 day sojourn to Fantasy Island ended and crews loaded boats for the 60 mile sail home, where they found checks in the mail. They're now awaiting the opening of their soon-to-be-favorite movie that hopefully will be coming to a theater near you. ☺

## LIGHTS, CAMERA, *sailing action*

I must admit our favorite movies with sailboats or sailing scenes are the ones that include our beloved Caribbean, "El Caribe" as we call it in Spanish. We especially like films which take place here in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands because this is our home.

"The Rum Diary," based on the novel by Hunter Thompson and featuring Johnny Depp, Amber Heard, Aaron Eckhart, Richard Jenkins and Giovanni Ribisi, among others, finished filming last year in Puerto Rico and should hit theaters in 2010. The story is about Paul Kemp, a freelance journalist, who finds himself at a critical turning point in his life while writing for a run-down newspaper in Puerto Rico in the 1950s.

We were fortunate to see some of the sailboats that will be in the movie and climbed aboard one of the schooners as guests. We met some sailors who will be in the movie and also took out sailing, on our own boat, the movie's executive producer, Patrick McCormick, and his family.

Our home waters have starred in other classics of the past. Kurt Russell and Martin Short's "Captain Ron," filmed in Puerto Rico and the Spanish Virgin Islands, included scenes at our home port, Marina Puerto Del Rey in Fajardo. Also on the list are Alan Alda's "The Four Seasons," filmed in part around the US-VIs, mostly St John; and "Two On the Isle," the story of Robb & Rodie White and their romance in Marina Cay, featuring Sidney Poitier, which was filmed entirely in the BVIs. —Capt. Tovy Miro