



MAY I HAVE YOUR

autograph?

By Joquita Burka

It became a local pastime. "Want to go to the set and see if we can spot George Clooney?" someone would ask. And off we'd go hoping for a photo, a flash of that famous smile, or even just a glimpse. When Renée Zellweger joined the cast, the sport of "star sighting" came to include men and women and sites all over the South Carolina Upstate—Anderson, Greer, Boiling Springs, Ware Shoals, Travelers Rest and of course, Greenville. What created all the buzz? It was the filming of Universal Pictures "Leatherheads," a film co-written, directed and starring George Clooney.

The film crew decided on the northwest corner of South Carolina after seeing firsthand the hospitality and beautiful historic buildings so lovingly maintained in many of the downtown areas. The director was looking for the perfect setting for his 1920s-era story about an aging football hero who convinces a college football star to join him in a ragtag pro league—destined to become the NFL—in its infancy.

After recruiting college football star and WWI hero Carter Rutherford (played by John Krasinski of "The Office") to join the team, Dodge Connolly (Clooney) has high hopes for this growing national sport. Enter complications—both in romance and sports—in the form of a strong, outspoken reporter played by Renée Zellweger.

The Calhoun, a historic hotel being renovated into condos in Anderson, played a pivotal role as did the Westin Poinsett Hotel in Greenville and most of downtown Greer. North Greenville provided the site of the sports field and saw most of the football action. For 34 days of the 65-day shooting schedule, the Upstate hosted a cast of 27 featured players, 5,000-plus man days for extras and more than 430 crew members. However, at night it was Greenville that hosted the stars in local dining spots such as Soby's and Restaurant O. It became the early morning discussion at work: "Anybody see George or Renée last night?" (Like we were so intimate that we could use their first names.)

For all of us who call this area home, it was a ball. First there were the open casting calls for football players that brought out thousands of able-bodied males. Then there was the need for extras of all types which allowed any number of the population to enjoy that "15 minutes of fame" that would actually end up as mere seconds on the screen; never mind how short our stardom. We got a chance to show off our fine little corner of the world and rub shoulders—if only for a brief moment—with Hollywood.

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