

# PEORIA JOURNAL STAR

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## Hollywood Comes to Blue Island, but...

Jebens Ace Hardware has been a fixture in Blue Island for more than 130 years, but, for at least a day, the hardware store is being transported hundreds of miles away – as well as back in time – without moving an inch.

Above the store's awning, a newly painted blue-and-white sign tells passers-by on Olde Western Avenue that Jebens has "been serving Syracuse since 1876."

Hollywood is once again coming to Blue Island, and a block of Olde Western is being transformed into downtown Syracuse, N.Y., circa the late 1950s.

Filming will take place today for "The Express," which tells the story of Ernie Davis, the first black college football player to win the Heisman Trophy.

Davis was an All-American at Syracuse University, leading the school to the 1959 national championship. He was awarded the Heisman Trophy in 1961.

Crews on Friday were busy putting the finishing touches on storefronts, including covering an empty space next to Jebens into "Eddie's Coffee Shop." Merchandise in Jebens' front window was replaced to resemble a 1950s-era hardware store, and Syracuse banners were hung in the window.

"They were very accommodating," said Judy Tuma, Jeben's manager.

But some of Tuma's neighbors see the production having the potential to hurt their business.

Parking will be restricted in that area for much of the day, and Charlie Orr, owner of Maple Tree Inn, is worried diners won't be able to get to his restaurant at the corner of Olde Western and Canal Street.

"(Saturday) is my best night," he said Friday. "It's just unbelievable. I don't know what it's going to cause for my business."

Orr's neighbor across Olde Western, Maria Lopez, said she does about \$3,500 worth of business on a good Saturday at her restaurant, Mariscos 7 Mares. Universal Studios, which is producing the film, offered her \$400 to make up for potential lost business, but she was able to negotiate payment of \$1,500.

Orr said he wasn't offered any money by the studio.

“Not one penny,” he said.

Maria Roxas, key assistant locations manager for the film, met with affected businesses and assured the city that restaurants, including Maple Tree, were compensated, said Mary Poulsen, Blue Island’s marketing director. Roxas was not available late Friday.

Orr also complained that no one from the city contacted him or other business owners to let them know about the production. Poulsen said that the studio asked the city to keep word of the filming under wraps as much as possible to limit crowds.

Signs, printed in English and Spanish, will be posted to let people know about the filming, and five police officers will be directing traffic, she said. Shooting should be wrapped up by late afternoon today, and disruption to businesses along Olde Western should be minimal, Poulsen said.

As a worker scraped clean the window of Trukko’s Salon, 13319 Olde Western, owner Elsa Ruiz said she was excited about what was happening.

“This is all good,” she said. “It’s good for the city of Blue Island.”

Art Bulmann, Jeben’s owner, said he’ll be letting the hardware store’s commercial and industrial customers in via the back door, but doesn’t think his retail business will suffer much.

“We normally shut down at 2pm anyway,” he said.

Tuma, however, said she has to be at the store by 5:30 this morning because some exterior shots might be filmed by the store’s entrance.

Poulsen said Universal will be back in Blue Island in May and June, filming at Memorial Park.

“They’re going to use the stands at Memorial for a football game to film Ernie as a kid playing football, so there are going to be opportunities for crowd shots,” she said.

Born in Pennsylvania, Davis went to high school in Elmira N.Y., and was nicknamed the “Elmira Express.” He’s being portrayed by Rob Brown, who played college ball and starred in another football film, “Coach Carter.”

In “The Express,” Denis Quaid plays Davis’ coach at Syracuse.

In 2005, Clint Eastwood came to Blue Island for film scenes for his World War II epic “Flags of Our Fathers,” and Olde Western Avenue was the backdrop for the CBS drama “Early Edition.”