

# NEWS

## Lake Carmel playwright wins international award

By Eric Gross  
Staff Reporter

LAKE CARMEL—Maybe Lake Carmel isn't such a long way from Hollywood, after all.

James Crafford, a playwright living in Kent who wrote an original screen play, "Chepachet," and acts in the film, has received top honors in the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival for his drama.

The film is about two middle-aged guy friends, Cole and Lud, who are recovering from a horrific car crash caused by the latter's alcoholism. They employ Karen, a beautiful but mentally challenged maid, who comes from a home for troubled girls.

Cole, who is played by Crafford in the production, develops a platonic crush on the beautiful young woman, played by Arune Kital, who won the Best Actress award in the international competition. He finds her inspirational in his work as a photographer of nature, but Lud sexually abuses her.

The action takes place in the town of Chepachet, Rhode Island. The actual filming was conducted in Kent with most of the production taking place at Crafford's home with other scenes shot at White Pond and the Kent Historical Society's one-room school house.

Crafford had praise for the Lake Carmel Fire Department for staging the car crash.

"It was absolutely extraordinary what they did. There was no way we could have afforded that. The emergency responders conducted the crash as a drill. We told them to 'play it as though it were happening.' The crash scene has a documentary feel to it," he said.

Theater critic Bonnie Wells described "Chepachet" as a "passion play and drama encompassing sweeping moral themes."

During an interview with the author last week, Crafford explained that the word "chepachet" was Native American in origin.

"It means 'crossroad' and my characters arrived at a crucial intersection between self and salvation, unable to dissolve the scars binding each to his own compulsions," he said.

Wells credited the "ensemble cast and bucolic setting of the drama as well as the sensitive use of light and color delineating the action as important players. The direction was adept and confident while being non-intrusive that allowed the characters to inhabit their roles."

"Chepachet" was the second screenplay written by Crafford while recovering from throat cancer.

His first play, "Funeral Song Lament," won an award in 2004. Crafford recalled his initial work was an "angry rant full of rage toward my illness that I had intended to be the all and end all. Instead, I discovered an opening of a Pandora's Box that allowed me to write additional plays."

Crafford grew up in Rhode Island and said that in recent years he has "taken an interest in anything I could find relating to the history of colonial America.

"I was used to seeing Indian names all over the place, including my home town of Pawtucket, which means 'the place by the little falls.' When I stumbled upon the definition of Chepachet - the place of the crossroads - it triggered an avalanche of ideas."

Crafford said he never intended any of his plays to be about cancer.

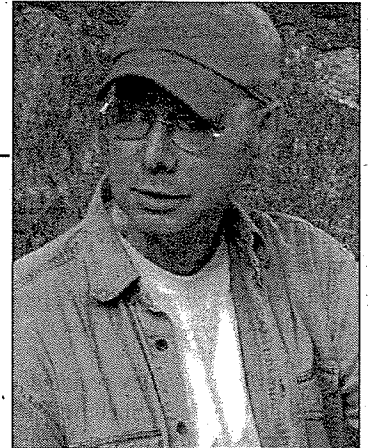
"I wanted them to be serious investigations of the mystery of human suffering, redemption, recovery and forgiveness," he said.

When not writing, Crafford is employed by a Manhattan law firm as a legal clerk.

Crafford and his wife of 20 years, Linda Myers, who also stars in the film, have a grown son, Martin, who is a landscape architect working in Connecticut.

Crafford said his stepson was involved in the film as well by designing a "very crucial final shot."

The film will soon be available on DVD. Crafford said his goal was to eventually distribute the film far and wide.



TOP HONOR WINNER: James Crafford of Lake Carmel stars in the new motion picture "Chepachet" that took top honors in the New York International Independent Film and Video Festival. (Photo courtesy James Crafford)