

# Oh, shoot!



Actor Michael Jeter gets a touchup on his makeup during filming in Collinwood. Jeter, who plays the oldest member of a criminal gang that tries to rob a pawn shop in the movie, was fitted with a special contact lense that turns one eye milky blue.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DALLE OMORI/THE PLAIN DEALER

Above, a vacant lot next to an old factory at E. 131st St. and Taft Ave. in Collinwood provides the backdrop for the first day of filming for "Welcome to Collinwood," a movie written and directed by brothers Joe and Anthony Russo. Cory Repp, 10, of

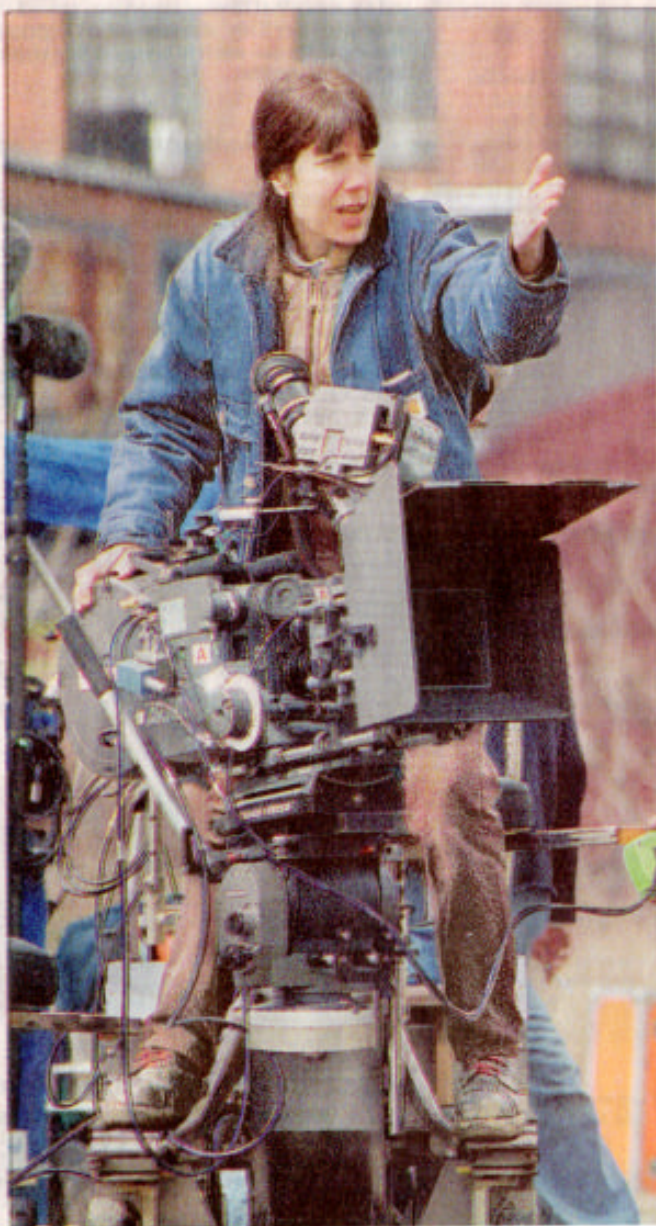


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Rain and cold settled in over Cleveland during the first day of filming for "Welcome to Collinwood." Lisa Rinzier, director of photography, took advantage of a break in the weather to set up a scene.



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By JOANNA CONNORS

PLAIN DEALER FILM CRITIC

**D**ay One of shooting.

Rain falls onto the exterior set of "Welcome to Collinwood," a cold, relentless, April-in-Cleveland rain that crystallizes into something between sleet and snow before melting and then seeping into the shoes and down the necks of the crew.

While they hustle to throw plastic sheeting over the camera and monitors, the wardrobe crew arrives with yellow rain slickers. Then everyone huddles under umbrellas and makeshift tents, squinting up at the gray clouds that have settled over the city like glum squatters with no place in particular to go.

"Anybody got an in with God?" asks Scott Shiffman, the line producer.

"My brother's a rabbi," offers Ben Cosgrove, the producer.

Shiffman calls the production office across town for a weather forecast. Anthony and Joe Russo, the brothers who wrote and are directing the film, pace outside in the rain, smiling as gamely as they can. They're wearing matching black windbreakers with "Welcome to Collinwood" stitched on the front in red, a gift from their agents to celebrate the first day of their first major motion picture. Anthony ducks under the biggest tent to light a cigarette.

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**Weather clobbers crew on first day**

"This feels like a rain where we'll be waiting for at least an hour," Joe says.

Until the rain settled in after lunch, the day was going great. The Russo brothers and their sister and assistant, Angela, arrived at 6:15 a.m. at their first location, a vacant lot next to an old factory at E. 131st St. and Taft Ave. in Collinwood.

"None of us slept last night," Angela says, shivering in the early morning cold.

The night before, she gave her brothers T-shirts with "They Can't Kill Us" printed on the back. All three Russos are wearing them under their jackets and sweaters. "That's our motto now," she says. "That's what we say every time something goes wrong."

But for several hours, nothing goes wrong. Lighting and equipment trucks from a rental company in Atlanta line the street next to the lot; crew members unload them, laying tracks for the camera and setting up monitors, sound equipment and chairs for the directors, producers and actors. A member of the construction crew cuts a hole in the chain-link fence. Another sprays the grass with paint to yellow it.

Inside the hair and makeup trailer, actor Michael Jeter shows Joe and Anthony Russo the contact lens he had made especially for his role as Toto, the oldest member of the feckless gang that tries to rob a pawn shop in the movie. It clouds his eye to a milky blue.

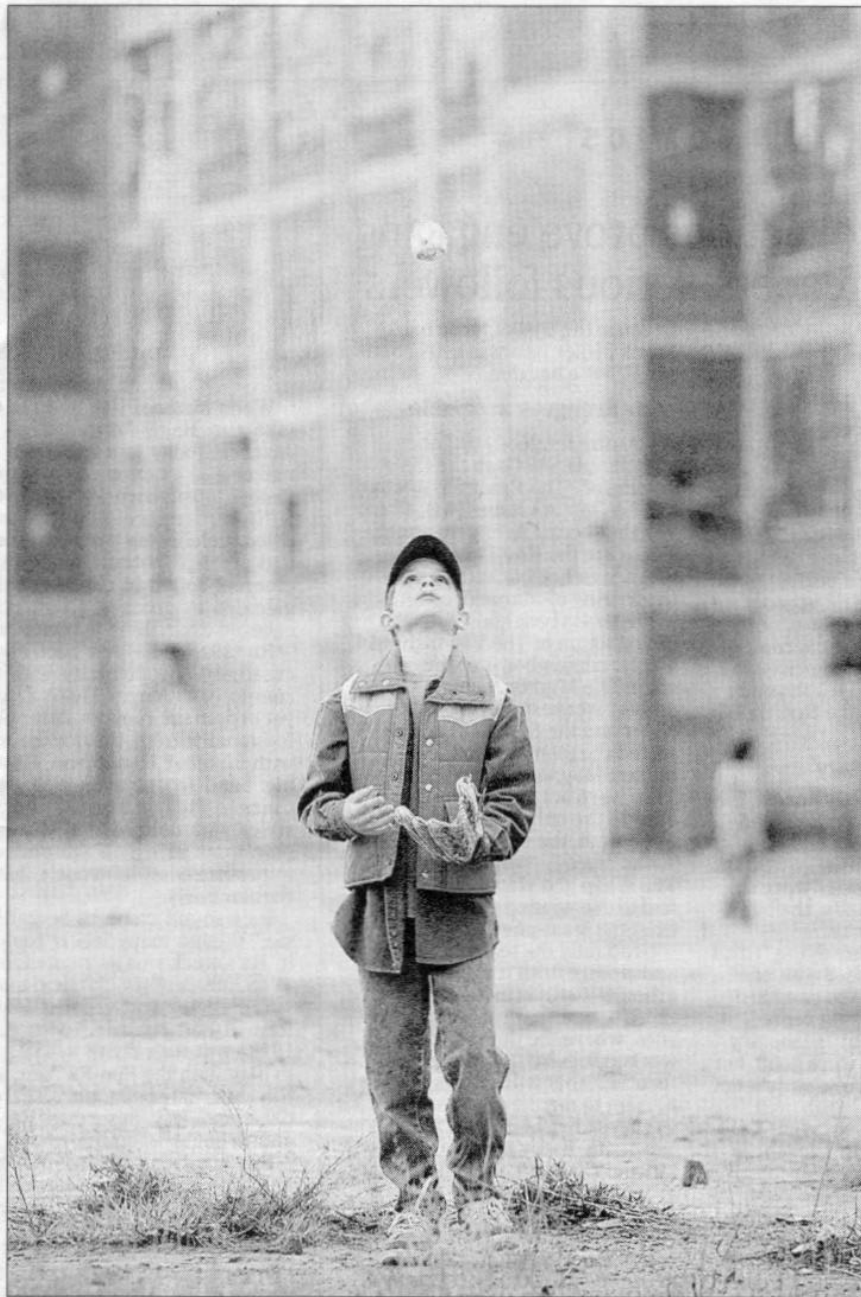
"Can you see?" Joe Russo asks.

"Not much," Jeter says. "Well, I can see shapes."

"It looks great," Anthony tells him.

"My gift," Jeter says, bowing slightly.

In the wardrobe trailer next door, the crew outfits 12 local kids who will be extras in the day's first scene with Jeter. Their excited parents take photos of them as they emerge from the trailer, dressed in old thrift-store jackets and rolled-up pants. A couple of the kids carry scuffed-up wooden baseball bats for the game they'll be playing in the vacant lot that Jeter will cross, looking for someone.



Garrett Komyati, 11, of Eastlake tosses a baseball in the air between scenes as filming begins on "Welcome to Collinwood."

DALE OMORI / THE PLAIN DEALER

Over at the lot, director of photography Lisa Rinzler choreographs the camera's movements while Jeter's stand-in walks along the fence and ducks through the hole. The first assistant director, Glen Trotiner, and the second assistant director, Dean Garvin, position the kids playing baseball in the background.

"No one looks at the camera!" Trotiner says to the kids, an order he will repeat again and again throughout the morning. The kids nod, doing a good job of acting as though they're listening.

When all is ready, the Russo brothers escort Jeter to his place. He bends over, lost in thought.

All is ready. Trotiner calls for quiet. It's time for the first shot.

At that moment, Cosgrove looks at the Russo brothers and pulls them aside. They whisper together.

"We've worked on this movie, the three of us, for six months," Cosgrove says later. "We had times when we said, 'If only we could get this actor,' or 'If only we were in Cleveland,' or 'If only we got this money and could get greenlit.' And I realized that we needed to take a moment right before the first shot and step back and realize where we are right now. It was really, really a fantastic moment."

Four hours later, the moment is

not so fantastic. The rain comes down harder. A gust of wind whips in and lifts one of the tents, almost turning it over.

Joe Russo paces between the camera and the monitor tent. He wants to get going, maybe pack this location in and move across the street to an interior set. But that set isn't ready. Shiffman wants to wait for the weather report.

"This is nothing," Shiffman says. "I've been through five hurricanes in two years. We had to evacuate when we were shooting 'Takedown' [a yet-unreleased Miramax-Dimension film] a couple of years ago in Wrightsville Beach. That was a direct hit. And on 'The Contender,' the city shut us down one day because of wind and rain."

Shiffman calls the off-

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Shiffman calls the office again, looking for the weather report. They haven't gotten it yet.

Twenty minutes later, the call comes back from the office: The rain should last another half-hour, then it'll be clear for an hour and a half. Then it will start snowing.

"We wait it out," Shiffman says.

When the rain lets up slightly, the crew scrambles to get the scene going. It calls for a character named Mrs. Mishlovic, played by local actress Sue Antal, to talk to Jeter while taking laundry off a clothesline and holding a baby, all at the same time.

Antal steps up to the clothesline and rehearses with Jeter. After a few runs through the scene, they get ready to shoot. Rain still falls, in a light mist. The directors stand behind the camera.

They hand the baby to Antal. "Action," Trotiner calls.

Antal begins removing laundry. Jeter walks up to her.

The baby starts crying, a wail that ascends to a scream. Antal and Jeter talk over the baby's screams. The camera rolls. The baby keeps screaming.

Cosgrove shakes his head and smiles.

"Nothing's easy for anyone in this movie," he says. "That's thematically what's going on in the movie; it's a world that doesn't give these guys a break. In real life, if the baby's crying and it's raining, that's the way it is. What are you going to do?"

For Day Two, the weather report calls for snow.

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