

FIRM FILMING COMMERCIAL FINDS PEOPLE IN MARS QUITE DOWN TO EARTH

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MEMO: Darlene White Natale is a free-lance writer.

They considered Neptune. They considered Jupiter, Pluto and even the moon. They settled on Mars. The topic was salad dressing, not the next NASA mission (though perhaps NASA would succeed in a mission to this Mars).

Cucoloris Films, of Venice, Calif., was hired by Kraft to produce a commercial for a new line of low-calorie salad dressing, saying its "taste is out of this world." Cucoloris' art director, Lisa Leone, has family in Cranberry and thought Mars would be the ideal small town.

When the production company came to Mars last week, the town welcomed it with open arms. Mayor Robin Pittman said she worked with the crew for three weeks before it came to town.

The 30-second commercial is set at the annual Mars Picnic. Most people are dressed like aliens, but one man in the background is wearing a dark suit, sunglasses and an earpiece, looking like an FBI agent.

It's not a coincidence. The commercial's director is Danny Duchovny, brother of David Duchovny, of TV's "The X-Files." Duchovny admits he was loosely parodying his famous brother.

"When my brother sees [the commercial], he'll call me and give me grief," Duchovny said with a coy smile. Duchovny said he really liked working in Mars because everyone was so friendly and normal. "I'd come back here any time." Sally Trugan, whose young son was an extra, returned the compliment, noting how well children were treated. "These were the greatest people to work with," she said.

The FBI agent, Adams resident Mike Higgins, was drafted by the casting crew at the Mars Area Soccer Club fields Saturday. Many others answered casting call ads placed in local papers.

Mars youngsters Matt Cesare and Dana Wonderly were spotted by the casting director leaving the Mars Bank. Higgins said when he went for his "call-back

audition" at the Sheraton Inn Pittsburgh North in Marshall, he was asked to do an alien dance while eating a carrot. Others said they were auditioned in the same manner.

The shoot took three days and 60 performers. Duchovny said the crew was mostly from the Pittsburgh area, except for a core group of Californians from Cucoloris.

Mars Area Middle School pupil Rachel Warfield said she dances and mingles during the commercial.

"I have to pantomime the whole time -- I'm not allowed to talk," she frowned. "But it's fun because you get to know a lot of people."

It's doubtful the sixth-grader objected to skipping three days of school or earning \$125 a day, either.

Little Ryan Trugan, a first-grader at Mars Area Primary Center, spent most of Wednesday sitting in a coin-operated spaceship ride dressed as an alien, waiting for his cue.

"When they start the music, I rock this thing and try to break it," he said, then demonstrated vigorously.

The commercial centers on the picnic, with "Martians" -- complete with springy antennae -- having a dance contest and eating salad dressed with Kraft Lite Done Right dressing.

The announcer says: "We like things that are low in fat and taste good. Before you look at us like we're from Mars, there's something you should know. We are." Duchovny said that of all the actors on the set, viewers will probably hear from only a set of identical twin boys who shout, "We are!"

The break tent had huge trays of lettuce and various Kraft Lite Done Right dressings. The children all -- predictably, perhaps -- said they loved the dressing. "I think it was fantastic," said Mars Area High School student Peiman Mehri, wrapped in silver lame. "It was out of this world."

Lindsay Mellor, a Penn State sophomore and Mars Area grad, said she had the ranch, and it didn't have that watery taste that low-cal dressings usually have. "I ate about a ton of it. It didn't have that low-calorie taste," said Chris Frank, a local developer with a primary role in the commercial.

Like Higgins, Frank was recruited at the soccer field.