

Hollywood stars' praise gives Annapolis national exposure

By SHANTEÉ WOODARDS, Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, July 8, 2012 12:00 am

Gavin Buckley remains surprised and grateful for the star treatment he's been receiving since getting an endorsement from actor Kevin Spacey.

With Annapolis being the setting for the upcoming movie, "Better Living Through Chemistry," it was not unusual to see actors like Sam Rockwell, Justin Long and Olivia Wilde patronizing local businesses. Still, Buckley was unaware that Spacey, who is not in the Chemistry movie, would rave about Metropolitan Kitchen & Lounge's as being a favorite late-night haunt because of its live music and rooftop deck. Spacey's description of the restaurant — as a "very cool place" — was published in the June issue of Men's Journal. The restaurant Tweeted the article, and its Twitter feed is linked on the restaurant's blog.

"(The actors) were all really regular people and they were out, and not asking for any kind of special treatment," Buckley said. "It's really cool. Kevin Spacey knows he's going to be getting some kind of hassle a certain amount of time. But (actors) don't stay holed up in their hotel rooms. They still come out and get involved in the community."

The Metropolitan Kitchen & Lounge is the most recent Annapolis area locale to receive the star treatment. Over the past couple of months, the area has been getting national exposure in print, cyberspace or on television. Actors have been Tweeting or blogging about it, and national news programs are filming segments downtown from behind Russell Rankin's eCruisers. In the last year, at least eight area restaurants have been featured in reality cooking shows. Last year's movie "The Help" featured a seven-layer caramel cake made at Caroline's Cakes in Annapolis.

Local business leaders have been using it to their advantage. Annapolis Business Association President Sean O'Neill has found that certain endorsements work for specific businesses. Pinterest is ideal for interior designers and fashion, Facebook can have an impact on general retail businesses and Twitter has been ideal for entertainment venues.

"This will probably help make (Annapolis) a destination for the day tripper," O'Neill said. "Annapolis has always been a little jewel. It's just that the rest of the world is finally learning about it."

"Better Living" actresses Wilde and Jane Fonda took to the Internet to talk about Annapolis. Wilde was fond of going to the Metropolitan and Tweeting about everything she observed in the community, like a pale, Jimmy Stewart double at the Annapolis Bookstore to hearing about a local Thai place that "is so good it's like crack." In a June entry on Fonda's blog, she called Annapolis "utterly charming" and posted pictures of Maryland Avenue, the Statehouse and within Galway Bay Irish Pub.

The NBC Today show was in the midst of reporting a segment on a Florida town that uses golf carts

instead of cars. While down there, a Florida resident told producers that they should check out the eCruisers in Annapolis. The show contacted Rankin, and the episode aired June 25. Reporter Kerry Sanders interviews Rankin as he drives him through downtown Annapolis.

Being on the Today Show has generated a lot of buzz for Rankin, but he is unsure about how much of it will translate into new business. The company offers 13 electric low speed vehicles.

“It’s hard to say (the impact). but I think it will help and it will definitely be great for the resume,” Rankin said. “This is the kind of publicity we can get for (Annapolis). That group found us; we never put a press release out. Imagine what would happen if you put a press release out saying ‘this is what we’re doing for the City of Annapolis’.”

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