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## Hundreds show up for 'House of Cards' casting call in Bel Air

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They came by the hundreds – actually upward of 2,000 – from near and far, hoping to get their advertisement few seconds of fame on the small screen.

The "House of Cards" open casting call for extras needed in Season III of the Netflix TV political thriller starring Kevin Spacey drew a huge crowd of hopefuls to downtown Bel Air on a sunny Saturday morning.

By 9:30, the line outside the Bel Air Reckord Armory, where the casting call was being held, stretched down Main Street and around on Lee Street as far as Hickory Avenue a very long block away.

The doors were not due to open until 10 a.m. and even after they did, people kept lining up. By 12:30 p.m., people were still standing two and three deep along Lee Street.

Kimberly Skyrme Casting was holding the open call for union and non-union extras and day players, seeking "people of all types, ages, sizes and ethnicities," according to an announcement that went out earlier in the week.

Aspiring players were also advised to come dressed to showcase "their best Washington, D.C., political look," and many did just that, including a few men who wore tuxedos.

Others who were dressed in dark suits practiced some of their "Secret Service agent" moves while waiting for the line to start moving, according to Dave Magnani of Abingdon, who took several photos outside and inside the armory.

Trish Heidenreich, director of economic development for Bel Air, assisted the casting agency inside the armory and said they received between 1,400 and 1,500 applications and estimated that, in all, "2,000 people came to downtown Bel Air" because of the casting call.

"It was amazing," Heidenreich said Tuesday, noting the interviews went on until 4 p.m. because of the huge turnout, which she said appeared to be double the number who turned out for the Season II call last year.

"We managed to get everyone in," she added.

"Everybody seemed to be happy to be there and have an opportunity to get in on this very popular production," Heidenreich continued. She said some people came from hundreds of miles away – she heard of at least one person who had come from Alabama and another from New York.

Heidenreich said the casting agency was "absolutely surprised" at the turnout, which she noted meant the

visitors were exposed to the downtown shops and restaurants.

"That's a really important part of this, bringing people to town and showing it off to a wide audience," she said. "I think people who were here for the first time were pleasantly surprised. One woman from Annapolis said she had never been to Bel Air but liked it so much she would be coming back. That made us happy."

Jack Gerbes, director of the Maryland Film Office who helped coordinate the casting call, said he was "very, very happy" with the day, calling it "exciting" for Bel Air and for Harford County.

"Everything went well; it was fantastic," added Gerbes, who lives in Forest Hill and said he heard one person had flown in from Detroit for the call.

### **Optimism trumps waiting**

Despite the length of the line and the high odds of even getting picked for the show, let alone ever being seen on camera, everyone was in a generally cheerful and friendly mood. There was plenty of shade in which to stand and the early morning temperatures were cool. But it started getting warmer as the day wore on.

"I'm here because I need some excitement in my life," Linda Samuels, 68, of Aberdeen, said as she stood far back in the line on Lee Street, near the Har-Co Credit Union parking lot entrance.

Samuels said she has been caring for her husband, who is recovering from a massive stroke suffered three years ago, and his rehabilitation has progressed to the point where she can leave him alone for a time. So, she thought she would take the acting plunge.

"I also lost 75 pounds and I feel real good about myself," she said, while suggesting there were so many people in line because of the show's growing popularity.

Dawn Hart, 41, a mom and a substitute teacher from Alexandria, Va., said her husband was doing his Army Reserve duty this week and she hitched a ride north with him so they could be together.

"If nothing else, it's fun," she said.

"I've always been involved in athletics and I wanted to try something different for once, and this is definitely different - and I like it," said Alessandra Troncoso, 20, from Fairfax, Va., who said she is an NCAA Division I swimmer at UNC-Asheville.

Across Lee Street from the line, Bel Air Mayor Rob Reier paused from his morning walk with his golden retriever, Jack, to take in the scene.

"This is something else - Hollywood coming to Bel Air once again," Reier said. "It seems like every time they have these casting calls it gets bigger and bigger."

"It's a nice day; it looks like a Wall Street job fair," he chuckled.

### **Worth the wait**

Keith and Churon Ringgold of Abingdon said they are veterans of the Bel Air casting calls and would not mind the wait.

Dressed in a sharp dark suit, Keith Ringgold said he landed a non-speaking part as a security man in Season I,

while his wife was a White House staffer. They didn't get anything in Season II, but weren't discouraged, he said.

"It's great to do this in your spare time, and it's something I would consider doing more of in retirement," said Keith Ringgold, who works as a subcontract administrator for Lockheed-Martin, while Churon is the secretary to Aberdeen Proving Ground's top general.

Keith Ringgold said the pay he received in Season I ran \$90 to \$100 a day, but it was worth it.

"We did it to have fun, purely enjoyment," he said.

Christa Ham of Bel Air showed up around 10 minutes after 1 p.m., only to find the end of the line was still at the corner of Lee Street and Hickory Ave. across from Bel Air Town Hall.

"Season 1 was nothing like this; everything was done by like 12:30; I didn't expect this," said Ham, 34, an EMT with the Bel Air Volunteer Fire Company who also works as a dispatcher for Hart to Heart Ambulance Services in Forest Hill.

Ham said she landed a role in Season I after attending the Bel Air casting call held at the armory in 2012. She was one of co-star Robin Wright's employees, but she never made it into the actual film after waiting around on the set.

"They feed you and put you through wardrobe and then put you in a room and after a while somebody comes in and points and say 'you, you and you,' and then they place people in the scene and keep moving them around, until they decide what they want," she explained in describing her experience and noting she wasn't one among the final "yous" that day.

Ham said the production paid minimum wage, but only if she stayed around waiting to get called for a scene.

"You come in around 7:30 in the morning and they might not wrap up shooting until 2:30 the next morning, and if you leave before they're done, you don't get paid," she said.

Ham, who ended up taking off her shoes during the wait in line, as did many others, said she didn't try to land a part in Season II, wanting to focus on her career instead, but she also admitted she wouldn't mind more movie exposure.

"People like Brad Pitt started out as extras and got a break because somebody didn't show up and became famous," she smiled.