

Appalachian Power retiree, employee take hobby to the big screen

by Dave Waitkus on March 20, 2014



Roanoke Servicer James Rucker with his 1941 GMC truck, which was used in the film "Wish You Well." The movie, to be released in theaters this spring, was filmed in southwest Virginia.

(Story by Allison D. Barker)

When Doc Brown turned a 1981 DeLorean DMC-12 into a time machine in "Back to the Future," few people thought about how that car came to be in the movie. Whether it's a specialty car like the DeLorean or an antique like Nucky Thompson's entourage used to load up bootleg liquor in HBO's "Boardwalk Empire," such cars seldom belong to the studios but private parties, like Roanoke servicer James Rucker and Human Resources retiree Susan Altizer and her husband, Norman.



Susan Altizer, who retired from the Roanoke Human Resources Service Center in 2010, poses in front of a poster promoting the film "Wish You Well."

With assistance from the Altizers' business, Classic Picture Car Coordinator Service, Rucker's 1941 GMC pickup truck was used in the feature film, "Wish You Well." Much of the movie, based on the novel by David Baldacci, was filmed in southwest Virginia near Pearisburg. It is to be released in theaters this spring.

"My truck was in 18 scenes," said Rucker, who recently celebrated 33 years with Appalachian Power Company. "It was used as the family's main vehicle in the film. One of the characters used a wheelchair and they needed an antique truck to haul the wheelchair. I was glad that they were able to use it in the movie. It is one of the most beautiful movies because it was filmed in the fall when all the leaves were turning. I can't wait to see it on the big screen."

Rucker's truck was among 32 antique vehicles that Norman Altizer, a retired auto mechanics teacher from Roanoke City Schools, placed in the movie.

"That includes our 1929 Model A Ford," said Susan Altizer, who retired in 2010 from the Roanoke Human Resources Service Center after 41 years with the company. "And I was recruited to be an extra in the film. ... Norman taught the stunt driver how to drive these antique cars and trucks."

When the Altizers first retired, their love of old cars was just a hobby. Then one day when Norman was at a junk yard, he learned someone affiliated with the movie was looking for antique cars in the area to be used in the film. Next thing he knew, he was working on the film.



Norman Altizer and his wife, Susan, an HR Service Center retiree, place antique cars in movies.

Here Norman is seen with a 1929 Ford used in the film "Wish You Well."

"Keeping all the cars going at the same time is a real challenge," Norman said. "When you are dealing with old cars, they break down a lot. You have to fix it right there on the spot so that they are ready all the time for whatever scene is next."

The couple is currently working to place vehicles for a miniseries to be filmed by The History Channel. The series, which will take about a year to complete, starts with World War I.

"Retirement has turned out fun and much different than we thought," Susan said. "We're having fun."

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