

RDC alumnus unveils feature film

BY MARK WEBER
Red Deer Express

Reagan Dale Neis is thrilled to be premiering her new feature film in her hometown.

Now based in Los Angeles, Neis grew up in Red Deer and graduated from the Red Deer College theatre studies program in the mid-1990s.

An experienced actor in her own right, Neis is branching out into producing – something she took on with *Dirty Habit* as well as tackling a demanding principle role.

A screening runs Dec. 10 on the RDC Arts Centre mainstage.

Doors open at 7 p.m. with Neis and director Bryan Root to speak at 7:45 p.m.

The film starts at 8 p.m.

"For me it's really exciting because I get to premiere a movie I worked so hard to create to my family and friends," she explains.

Faith, addiction and the abuse of power are the focus of this psychological thriller about crack-addicted prostitute Leslie (Kirsty Hinchcliffe) and Sister Amelia (Neis) who find themselves trapped in the same elevator.

No one responds to their cries for help, so they turn to each other.

Leslie breaks down, smokes crack and goes

from standoffish to hostile.

Sister Amelia learns about the violence just committed by Leslie, and tensions build as Leslie in turn pries into the nun's private life.

They discover a shared secret.

Dirty Habit is described as a hallucinatory ride into the tortured soul of a girl sliding towards destruction.

"It's an edgy film, it touches on stories and characters that can at times make people uncomfortable," says Neis. "But they are real and these things do happen. There's also this ambiguity about what happens after life, and can we change our own destinies.

"Ultimately, it's a very powerful movie. I watched the final product the other day in

shock at how incredibly good this movie is."

Delving into such intense drama takes its toll – it's draining and it stays with an actor beyond the set.

Neis said that after the hectic two-week shoot, she felt completely exhausted on virtually every level.

"You're personal life is affected when you're doing a film that's dark," she explains. "When you're playing someone so absolutely tortured for awhile, it's a part of your life."

But seeing it take shape is exhilarating. Surrounding oneself with the finest team of artists and actors is also essential adds Neis, praising her prolific co-

stars Hinchcliffe and Sam Anderson who plays a Catholic bishop.

Working with Root, who also penned the

script, was also a fabulous experience of growth for Neis as she took on the role of producer along with the demands of acting.

The intensity of the project at times surfaced in their working relationship as the collaboration unfolded, but only fuelled the creative energies.

Ultimately, their friendship only grew and she holds him in the highest regard as an artist as well.

"It's absolutely about the final product."

The film marks a compelling change of pace for Neis as well, who usually tackles lighter, more comical fare.

Physical changes were part of tapping into the complexities of her character.

For *Habit*, she dyed her blonde hair dark brown and gained 25 lbs.

"That's what just goes with the character and helps get you into being this person," she says.

"I really took on this woman's life, and I'm so thrilled to be able to show people that side of my work."

Proceeds from tickets (\$10 or \$8 for students) will support the Red Deer College motion picture arts program.

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REAGAN DALE NEIS