



Tribune Photo | Bob Thebeau

Joe Mandecino, director of photography, (right) prepares a scene with actors portraying the Founding Fathers while filming the documentary "We the People" Tuesday at RSVP Productions in Lee's Summit. The film is set to debut on President's Day 2009 in Washington, D.C

# MEN IN TIGHTS

## PORTION OF FOUNDING FATHERS FILM SHOT IN LEE'S SUMMIT

**BY: DARREN MCANALLY, Tribune Intern**

Men wearing wigs and tights performed in front of a green screen in Lee's Summit this week.

Shakespearean they were not, but one man was the spitting image of John Hancock.

The actors portrayed our nation's Founding Fathers in "We the People," a three-part documentary slated to be released in Giant Screen theaters nationwide February 2009.

Narrated by Grammy Award winning singer Kenny Rogers, the comprehensive educational program tells the story of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Shot on a grand and epic scale, the film endeavors to bring history to life through reenactments.

For Kansas City filmmakers Aimee Larrabee and John Altman, the project has been a labor of love spanning four years. The two previously collaborated on IMAX Signature Films "Celebrate Detroit!" and "Kansas City Presents."

"Shooting in Lee's Summit is a real treasure," Larrabee said. "The artistic community here is phenomenal."

The Lee's Summit filming took place at RSVP Productions at 1801 N.E. Independence Ave.

Larrabee and Altman hit a roadblock when they were only allowed to film at night in Philadelphia's Independence Hall. They resolved to capture the historical meeting place digitally. Their multi-angle images could then be planted behind the actors as they debated and adopted the Constitution right here in Lee's Summit.

"This gives us total flexibility with the lighting, time of day, and configuration of the room," Larrabee said. "We just finished shooting in Virginia and flew a lot of the actors back here to recreate this."

One actor, Dean Malissa, has portrayed George Washington professionally for 8½ years. A first person historical interpretive actor, Malissa is the official George Washington at Mount Vernon.

"I'm a curious mix of a scholar and an actor," Malissa said. "I left corporate America electively and happily and became an actor in my native Philadelphia when I came under the tutelage of the top portrayer of George Washington."

Malissa wasn't the only one who knew a little something about the man he embodied. Jim A. Choate was working as the key makeup and special effects artist for "We the People," when he was approached to play John Hancock due to his striking resemblance.

Still, Choate handled his research like a true professional.

"Hancock was made president of the Continental Congress because he was the wealthiest man in America," Choate said. "He owned 65 ships and almost single-handedly financed the Continental Army."

Not bad for a makeup guy.

All the enthusiasm pays off on Presidents Day 2009 when "We the People" is scheduled to premier in Washington, D.C.

The film is a collaboration of the Bill of Rights Institute, the Smithsonian Institute and Inland Sea Productions, Inc.