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# Hollister native gets role in 'Zombieland' revival

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Special to the Free Lance

Posted: Wednesday, April 24, 2013 11:38 am | Updated: 12:24 pm, Wed Apr 24, 2013.

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Posted on April 24, 2013 by [Melissa Flores](#)

While zombies are a hot commodity in Hollywood, one Hollister native is hoping to jump on the bandwagon with a turn in "Zombieland: The series," which premiered for free on Amazon Instant Video last weekend.

Kirk Ward, who grew up in Hollister but has worked in Hollywood for the last 20 years, plays one of four main characters on the show. As Ward tells it, he worked with two of the executive producers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick before they launched the successful "Zombieland" feature film, which starred Woody Harrelson in the role that is now inhabited by Ward.

"I had worked with the creators on a show called 'Invasion Iowa,'" Ward said. "Right after it wrapped they wrote this script with a part for me. They said 'Tallahassee' was inspired by me. I remember having two feelings you usually have as an unknown actor when someone writes something for you."

He said the first feeling was that he was floored because he loved the project but his second feeling was that the role was probably going to go to somebody else. In the end, he didn't audition for the role when casting began for the film.

"It ended up getting made and it went to Woody Harrelson and went to the theater," Ward said. "I said, 'That's the end of that.' I didn't want to go around telling people that it was written for me."

He said he didn't even tell his family that the role of the Zombie-fighting Floridian was meant for him. Reese and Wernick asked him to audition more than once for the TV series before he finally relented. He said he was hesitant because at the time, many TV shows were choosing big-name actors for lead roles.

"Against all odds I got the part that was originally intended for me," he said.

Reese said Ward had a "leg up" on the audition because the part was written for him.

"He tore the roof off with his audition," Reese said, by email. "We knew from the moment the first scene ended that he was our first choice."

Reese said the concept of "Zombieland" was always intended to be a TV series, so the transition from a movie was easy.

"In the grand scheme, our characters will be searching for a home – a place to put down roots and rebuild society," Reese said. "In the short run, they're headed to meet 'Detroit.' And they'll take many detours in between."

Named after their hometowns, the nerdy 'Columbus' is played by Tyler Ross while the feisty 'Wichita' – who is slow to form bonds with others – is played by Maiara Walsh. Her younger sister 'Little Rock' is played by Izabela Vidovic.

"The day we all came together we immediately started laughing and having a good time," Ward said. "That comes from the creators, Rhett and

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Paul. If you meet those guys you don't feel like they work in Hollywood – you just feel they are the sweetest guys from the Midwest. It trickles down on the sets."

As he was taking on the role of Tallahassee, Ward said he put Harrelson's performance out of his mind.

"I had to make it my own and look at it honestly – at the material and how it was written and how I would play it for me," he said.

Though Ward acknowledged it will take some adjusting for fans of the movie to get used to the new cast, which no longer includes Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone or Abigail Breslin, he said many feature films have made a successful transition to a TV series with a different cast.

"It's just very normal when transferring from one medium to another that usually it's a different cast," he said.

The "Zombieland: The series" pilot is one of 14 original series pilots that visitors can watch online at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or download to their phones or Kindles for the next few weeks for free. It is part of the movement toward streaming services creating original content for viewers, but Amazon has included another twist. Viewers will influence which pilots are picked up for a full season. Viewers are encouraged to leave reviews and ratings of each series, which include six shows for children along with comedies for adults. Based on viewership numbers, reviews and ratings, Amazon will decide which pilots will be picked up as a series. "Zombieland" does come with a warning that it contains violence and mature language so it is not suitable for young viewers.

"Amazon sparked to the Zombieland script," Reese said. "It couldn't be a more perfect match. Zombieland is a non-traditional show, and Amazon is a non-traditional 'network,' if you can even call it that. They're pioneering the way content will be consumed."

The show is produced by Reese Wernick Productions, Pariah and Amazon Studios in conjunction with Sony Pictures Television.

"We have the most ratings and reviews," Ward said a few days after the pilots first became available for viewing. "That doesn't mean we are guaranteed to get picked up, but the more eyeballs are on the show right now, the better."

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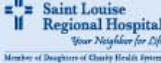


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