

MPTD Interview With Chan Claggett

Leslie Green: Hello, and thank you for joining us at Real Talk with Film DC. I'm Leslie Green, Senior Communication Manager at the DC Office of Motion Picture and Television Development. Today we have, joining us, Chan Claggett, he's a local DC location manager. We're so happy to have you here today to talk to us about the wonderful job you have of being a location manager here. Thank you, again, for joining us today.

Just tell us a little bit about what made you want to be a location manager. Is this something that you always wanted to do when you grew up?

Chan Claggett: Well, no, I didn't know I wanted to be a location manager, but I know that I was always curious. I was always exploring my environment growing up. I was always asking a lot of questions. My grandfather used to call me the reporter because I used to ask a lot of questions. I had no idea but we kind of found each other, location managing and myself found each other. [laughs] I was always very curious and I was exploring. I would go down every street in my neighborhood to see what was there. I was always going further and further. I grew up in Washington and I know Washington pretty well. We'd go down all of the back roads and figure out the shortcuts and see what's there and I would always look at different houses and buildings and parks and everything. I knew DC very well. It made it a good fit for me.

Leslie: Did you have another career prior to being a location manager?

Chan: Well, I was in marketing, and when I got involved in production, so, it kind of led me into it, in a way. Like when I was a kid, I used to always watch the credits on movies and TV shows. I used to wonder what it is those people did and always wanted to see my name there. I had no idea how I was going to do it or get there. But I guess my fate just took me there.

Leslie: Well, how did you get started in the industry? What would you say was your big break for DC?

Chan: It's a very interesting story. I got out of class one day, went downtown by the Building Museum. I saw a film production, it was a movie production. I'd never seen a movie production before. I stopped and I was speaking around, seeing what they were doing. I started talking to some of the crew, asking what their job was and what they did. I'd been there for about 20 minutes or so, and while I was talking to one of the crew, this woman came out and she was frustrated. Her mouth open, and she came over where I was and she said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm just coming by." She said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I don't mean to be in your way or anything, I was just curious." She said, "You want a job?"

It happened to be Carol Fleischer who is one of the premier location managers in the area. She took me under her wing, that was 25 years ago and she still mentors me today.

Leslie: Wow, that's incredible.

Chan: It was really a great event, turn of events for my life.

Leslie: Do you know what movie that was?

Chan: It was "Good To Go." The go-go movie in DC with that, Chris Black role was doing for [inaudible 03:28] Records and Films. It was over 25 years ago. It had Chuck Brown and all the go-go bands from then. It was quite an interesting project.

Leslie: Yeah, I'm sure.

Chan: For my very first project, it was really an experience. We had a car crash. We were supposed to. It was part of the movie. And a lot of other interesting events. A lot of good go-go music. It exposed DC, somewhat.

Leslie: If location manager weren't a career out there for you, what would you be doing if you weren't location manager?

Chan: Actually, I'm not exactly sure but I know I don't do well in an office environment. I could do it but I don't know if I'd appreciate it as much. I'm not a routine kind of person. I don't have a regular sleep schedule or a regular work schedule. I think it might have involved something with teaching or helping people in some way. I want to help people. I'm not exactly sure what I would be doing, but I don't think it would be in a place that has a routine location. It would be something that had some outdoor elements and some exploring and travel.

Leslie: What would you say is your most interesting or fulfilling project that you've worked on in your career?

Chan: There are a lot of them, but since I'm not routine and no two days are the same there's always something new and different and interesting. I think, for me, working directly with some very creative people, that's always been very rewarding. Always learning new things, going different places, exploring, which I always, always did. That's why it seemed to be such a nice fit for me.

I got to work with the NFL. I went around to just about all of the NFL team cities and interacted with some of the legendary sports people in football. I worked with the Olympics. I got a chance to work with the Olympics. That was something I always wanted to do. Muhammad Ali was there. I worked closely with him and his people.

Traveling and exploring is very fulfilling. I was always attracted to the water, so I got an opportunity to work in the Caribbean. I worked in the Caribbean, off and on, for about two years. I've been to over 35 islands. That was very rewarding and fulfilling for me.

I also did achieve the goal of seeing my name in the credits in movies and TV shows, so that was very rewarding.

Leslie: Yeah, I'm sure. I actually got to join you on a production that you did with Spike Lee. I guess that was two years ago now. What was it like working with him?

Chan: He is a very interesting character. He's not very predictable. He's very creative. But it's a very interesting experience. He calls me occasionally and asks me about what's going on in different things he's interested in. It's been an ongoing experience.

Leslie: What was that, that he was actually working on, here in DC? Are you allowed to talk about it?

Chan: The last project that he worked on here or that I worked on with him were some MSNBC promos.

Leslie: That's right.

Chan: But I worked on...I think it was called...I can't remember the name of them.

Leslie: That's OK.

Chan: I did work on a couple of projects with him. He was going to do another one of the Nike commercials, but that one didn't happen. There was going to be a movie he was working on. It's called Nagasaki. It's something about Nagasaki. The tsunami happened in Japan just when he was ramping up for that, so that project got shelved.

Leslie: What would you say is your most challenging project that you've worked on in your career?

Chan: There are always challenges. [laughs]

Leslie: [laughs]

Chan: I don't really want to look at problems as problems. I always approach it as a situation that needs attention.

Leslie: Perhaps a project that maybe helped you grow or to do better at your job.

Chan: Almost every one of them. But on the bigger productions you really learn a lot, because so many elements go into it. One of the last big ones was the Wilhelmina Lee movie with Judi Dench. That had some challenges in it, mainly because we had the storm...Sandy.

Leslie: Yeah, the hurricane.

Chan: That happened two days before we were to start filming, so we lost two very critical days that were the days we were supposed to tech scout. That's a very important part of the production process. We had to really start filming with very little tech scouting. Some of it we didn't get a chance to tech until later. That made that very challenging. We also had the RG3 Adidas commercial, which was a major challenge as well. We were dealing with FedEx Field and some major hotels that were some very critical locations in places in which it's hard to have a large production. But we made it work.

Leslie: You did. It was a great commercial. I've watched it over and over and over again.

Chan: Yeah, we would make it rain. It was quite a spectacle for anybody coming to see it. [laughs] For people driving by, I can imagine what they must have..."What is going on there with all the rain and people?" We had police cars. It was interesting.

Leslie: It's amazing how much goes into filming, just maybe even what is 30 seconds or a minute on TV. It is days and days and days of work for you, right?

Chan: Yeah, I think that was a 30 second spot. They made a 60 as well. But, we filmed for two days and overnight. There was a lot that went into it, for a short project. A lot of work was put in for something that you don't even realize you saw.

Leslie: [laughs] Exactly.

Chan: A lot of negotiating the tiny elements, but they play a major part in it.

Leslie: Well, what do you like most about filming in DC? What are your favorite parts of DC?

Chan: Well, I guess, getting to go where the other people don't normally get to go. Also, there's a lot of people, I'm a native here, but many natives don't even go to the museums and monuments. We take it for granted here, but I get to work there many times, so I go to all these places. I don't know how often I would see them or take advantage of them if I didn't work in this industry. Also, I've gotten to go to the White House and inside the FBI Building and Capitol, just places that I wouldn't normally have no reason to be there. On top of roofs of some of the buildings around town, and seeing it from a different perspective. That's always been a draw for me, very interesting to me.

Leslie: I'm sure there's probably no typical day, it's probably inaccurate to say typical. But what is it like to be on a set of a major commercial or a major production that you work on?

Chan: Well, as location manager, you have to be the first one there before everybody else and you're the last one to leave. They're very long days and you go from 0 to 200 in a moment. Because you get there, no one else is there and in a matter of minutes, there's a whole onslaught of crew and equipment and movement and everything. You have to make sure that everything is accessible, all the doors are open and unlocked and the elevators are working and everybody has somewhere to park.

You can make all the maps and diagrams and put up signs and everything everywhere, but there's always a surprise. Sometimes you show up and there's a truck parked in the middle of where you were going to film, or there might be a crane that's two or three blocks away, but it's right in the middle of your set now.

Many of these things, you can do all the preparation you want, but there's some things you just can't foresee, or get by you. There's always a surprise and you just have to be prepared for whatever comes your way. Those are some of the challenges that keep you on your toes.

Leslie: Out of all of the experiences that you've had as a location manager, what would you say is your most memorable experience?

Chan: Well, one thing is meeting three presidents. That was very memorable. I met and went to the White House with George Bush Senior, Clinton and Obama and worked on projects with Michelle Obama and with Laura Bush. Those were very interesting experiences for me. Plus working with people that I really admire. I've worked directly with Quincy Jones and Spike Lee

and Clint Eastwood and Ridley Scott. Sometimes it's just me and them in the car while I'm driving them around in my car. Those are very memorable experiences for me.

Leslie: Yeah, that's some big names.

Chan: Yeah.

Leslie: Tell us about the projects that you're currently working on.

Chan: I'm working on a Macy's still shoot right now and a National Geo project, which is in California. I've been all around the country except for the Northwest. I haven't been to Seattle and San Francisco. I've been to basically every major city, but next week, I'm going to the San Francisco area for a project with National Geo. I'm working on another major motion picture sequel, which I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement not to talk about it, so I can't tell you what that is right now. Then, I received a call recently about doing something with the All-Star game in Houston, so I don't know if that's going to happen or not, but you get those kind of projects that come up.

Leslie: Sounds like it's going to be pretty busy.

Chan: Yeah.

Leslie: Well, that's a good thing.

Chan: Yeah, it is.

Leslie: Is there a list of projects that you'd like to work on, you have a wish list?

Chan: Well, I want to do this, not necessarily a wish list of anything in particular, but I'm interested in doing things that more so help and educate people. I'm not as interested in the reality shows. I've worked on a couple of them, but I want to do something that's a little more meaningful. Well, I've always learned from other people's mistakes. When I see something that could help me or to show what, so how they made mistakes it helps me learn and grow. I want to do something like that and there are people who have learning processes that are not the way we traditionally educate our kids and visual media is a great way to educate people. I want to do something more in that genre.

Leslie: Last question for you. What advice would you give to aspiring film professionals, people who are looking to get into your industry?

Chan: Well, one thing is, I would advise them to volunteer, to intern or volunteer with the production. I volunteered with some productions and they paid off greatly because you get to meet people. I've had people volunteer with me, you see how hard and dedicated they are at something and you just want to employ them, so whenever you have an opportunity to, you do, after you see what they would do for free. The other thing, I had a guy who said he wanted to be a director. He volunteered to work with me, and he asked me, "How do you become a director?" He said, "There's no, really, school or certification or anything for becoming a director, per se." I said, "Well, if you want to be a director, direct." I told him to just take a home video camera and try to

put some stories together, edit them on his computer, and he did that and every chance he could film something, he did.

He would take those clips and edit and you learn something about doing it. He would, he learned how to frame and block and edit and what you needed to, what seems, what framing you need or action you need in order to cut and edit. That's my advice is to just do it, basically.

Leslie: Right. Cool.

Chan: Thank you.

Leslie: Well, thank you so much, Chan, for joining us. Again, we've been talking to Chan Claggett, a DC location manager, or I should say, a location manager, since you're doing projects, not just here in DC, but around the country as well, and producer. Thank you again for joining us. You have been listening to Real Talk with Film DC. You can join us on the web at film.dc.gov. Join us on Facebook at facebook.com/filmdc, and you can tweet us at [DCFilmOffice](https://twitter.com/DCFilmOffice). Thanks again, see you next time.