

# Lights, camera, action! Wheatfield native publishes book on making it in Hollywood

**BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO**  
Interim Tribune Editor

Actress, comedian and, most importantly, a Wheatfield native, Meghan Deanna Smith always knew that she was supposed to be an actor.

"My parents don't even know why. Ever since I was little and could speak, I just always said 'I'm going to be an actor,' even before I really knew what acting was. I even had a little shoebox underneath my bed that was my California fund," Smith says.

These days, she's doing just that.

As a working actress, Smith now resides in Los Angeles, because, let's face it, unless John Krasinski starts making "Quiet Place" movies every year, Western New York isn't the best place for an up-and-coming-actor to find work.

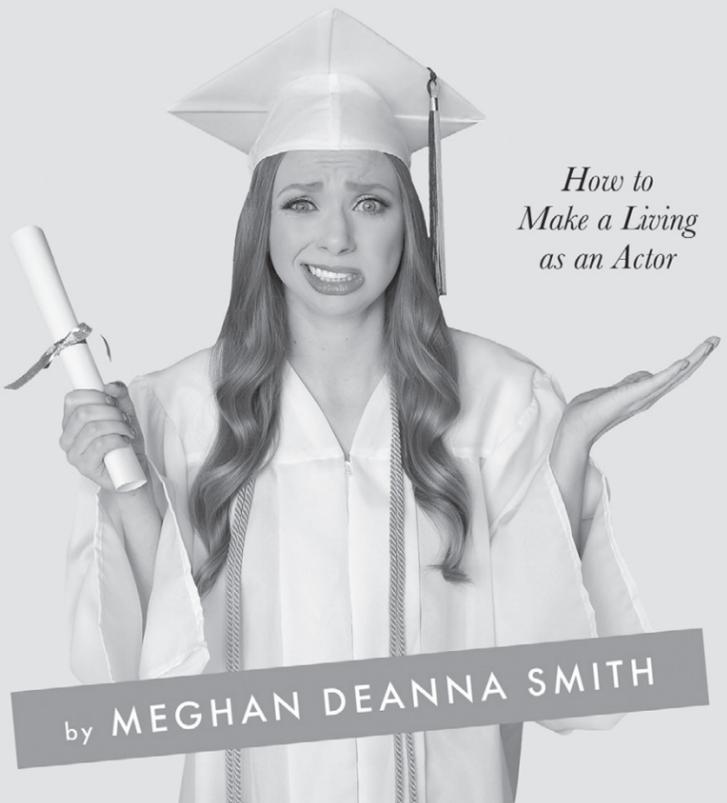
To date, her film and television include a starring role in "Sharknado: Heart of Sharkness," a guest-host spot on MTV's "Ridiculousness," lead parts in numerous award-winning indie films, and her most favorite role so far: "a slightly blurry background actor in an episode of NBC's "Parks and Recreation." In 2012, she was named International Modeling and Talent Association's "Actor of the Year," a competition through which many successful entertainers have been discovered including Katie Holmes, Elijah Wood and Eva Longoria.

Now, with years of schooling, auditions, gigs, and real-life set experience under her belt, Smith is hoping to impart some of the knowledge she's gained over the years to anyone looking to break into the entertainment industry. She recently published her debut book, a self-help guide for aspiring performers titled, "I Have a Degree in Acting ... Now What?"

Smith says she wrote the book to help newcomers avoid some of the pitfalls she experienced in her earliest days in the industry.

It was an idea she says had been mulled over in her head for years but she had never felt qualified to bring to fruition.

## I HAVE A DEGREE IN ACTING... NOW WHAT?



"I used to think 'Oh, when I'm famous, I'm going to write a book and give advice to people who were like me who might have grown up in somewhere like Buffalo, for example, and really have no idea how to get started,'" Smith said. "... After a couple of years of my own trial and error and really figuring it out and landing a couple credits in the film industry, I realized: you don't have to be famous to write a book! The majority of acting books that I've read aren't written by Brad Pitt! They're written by teachers, or people who

may be more unknown, just giving their advice.

"So I just kind of started writing some stuff down about 'well, this is what I learned about trying to get an agent' or these are some websites that you should apply for jobs on,' and eventually it just kept turning into more and more information, and now, basically I have a little mini book. I just really wanted other actors or other people to just not be as lost as I was at first," Smith says.

Acting, in and of itself, was never really the part of the job that Smith

found problematic. Since her earliest shoebox days, she's spent her life honing and developing her craft. In her youth, she joined the community theater. She later graduated from Niagara University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. From there, she pursued comedy training from ComedySportz Buffalo, and later the prestigious Second City Chicago.

Rather, it was the business side of the job that she was woefully unequipped for when she first started out.

"Although Niagara University and their theater department trained me wonderfully - they taught me everything I need to know about acting - they didn't teach me everything I needed to know about the business aspect," Smith says. "I knew how to analyze scripts, I knew how to memorize lines, I knew how to do drama, comedy; I knew how to do all those things ... I knew what to do when I got to an audition, but I literally had no idea how to even apply for an audition. Which is tricky!"

Beyond booking that first audition (which Smith describes her first as the worst experience of her life), the book includes a number of vital lessons for would-be working actors including specific and detailed information on headshots, acting reels, finding an agent, and joining the Screen Actors Guild. There's even a chapter on how to find a "survival job" and saving money for actors who are first starting out in a big city.

While the book is certainly geared towards aspiring actors, Smith says the book can be enjoyed by, and even useful to, anyone. Not only does it provide an interesting look behind the curtains of the film and television industry, a lot of the lessons and tips about selling oneself in an interview or on a resume are helpful tips for

anyone looking for a leg up in the business world.

"In the acting industry ... you're a product, and so you have to learn how to fill your product. That means knowing your look, knowing what style of acting you're best at, making sure your resume and headshot all kind of fit within that product," Smith says.

She adds, "So my best advice, just in general, whether you're an actor or not, let's say you're, a dental hygienist - know your brand, know what product you are, and when you go in for job interviews or submissions, just know that and have everything marketed towards what you do best and what you can provide that no other dental hygienist can. ... Just being confident in yourself and not wanting to please other people I think is huge."

With that said, Smith believes that, even if you've never caught the acting bug before, you might change your mind after reading the book.

"I kind of think that (the book) in itself, is entertaining enough that if you didn't have any aspirations to pursue acting that maybe after the book you'd be like, 'You know what? Maybe I could (be an actor)! Maybe I can get a headshot and, you know, I'll apply for the next film that's shooting in Western New York and I'll have a leg up and maybe get a small role in a John Krasinski movie!"

"I Have a Degree in Acting ... Now What?" is available now as a paperback and e-book. It can be purchased online from numerous retail sellers, including Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Walmart. You can also see her in her latest film, "For Jennifer," the latest installment in the "Jennifer" horror movie series, which recently was released on Amazon.

## Stella to hold 'Amazing Race'

Stella Niagara, the Lewiston Recreation Department and Niagara Outfitters will co-host the "Stella Niagara Amazing Race" on Saturday, Aug. 1

Amy Reynolds, Stella Niagara director of institutional advancement, said, "With the sudden end of school in March, we wanted do something fun for local families in a COVID-19-friendly way. This event seemed to fit in perfectly with our integrated outdoor education curriculum while being a fun family activity!"

The event will begin at Acade-

my Park and is family-friendly adventure that can be competitive or leisurely depending on one's family, she added. Families will solve the clues and complete activities at locations scattered throughout Lewiston. Families can travel to Stella Niagara by bike, kayak, walking, or by car for the finish.

Reynolds said the "Amazing Race" will see families travelling through Lewiston to Stella Niagara following clues that will be provided the day of the event.

"Leading up to the event, we encourage families to come up with

fun team names and outfits - creativity will factor into the prizes," she said.

Organizers will be at the finish from noon-5 p.m. on Aug. 1, but teams can start at any time.

"This event is open to the entire community!" Reynolds said.

The "Amazing Race" is open to all families and is free of charge. Families can register online at <http://stella-niagara.com/stella-niagaras-amazing-race/>.

Registered participants will be provided clues on the morning of Aug. 1.

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