

From Hollywood to Hot Springs



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Actor James Franco takes time out of filming in Marshall to pose with local student, Gabby Kline at the Iron Horse Station in Hot Springs.

By Melissa Dean

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Take away the glitz and glamour; add natural hot mineral water and a backdrop of the Appalachian Trail and Hot Springs transforms into Hollywood, briefly.

Enter James Franco.

For nine days over the New Years holiday, visitors and residents were seeing stars as the Iron Horse Station in Hot Springs welcomed actor Franco, along with 15 crew members to the inn.

"Our experience with them was that they are very friendly and generous," said Jim Natichioni, Iron Horse Inn and Restaurant general manager. "Always smiling and just having a good time."

The actor and crew members were in town to scout and film in Marshall for an up-coming drama, but according to Natichioni, fell in love with the fun, unique nostalgia of Hot

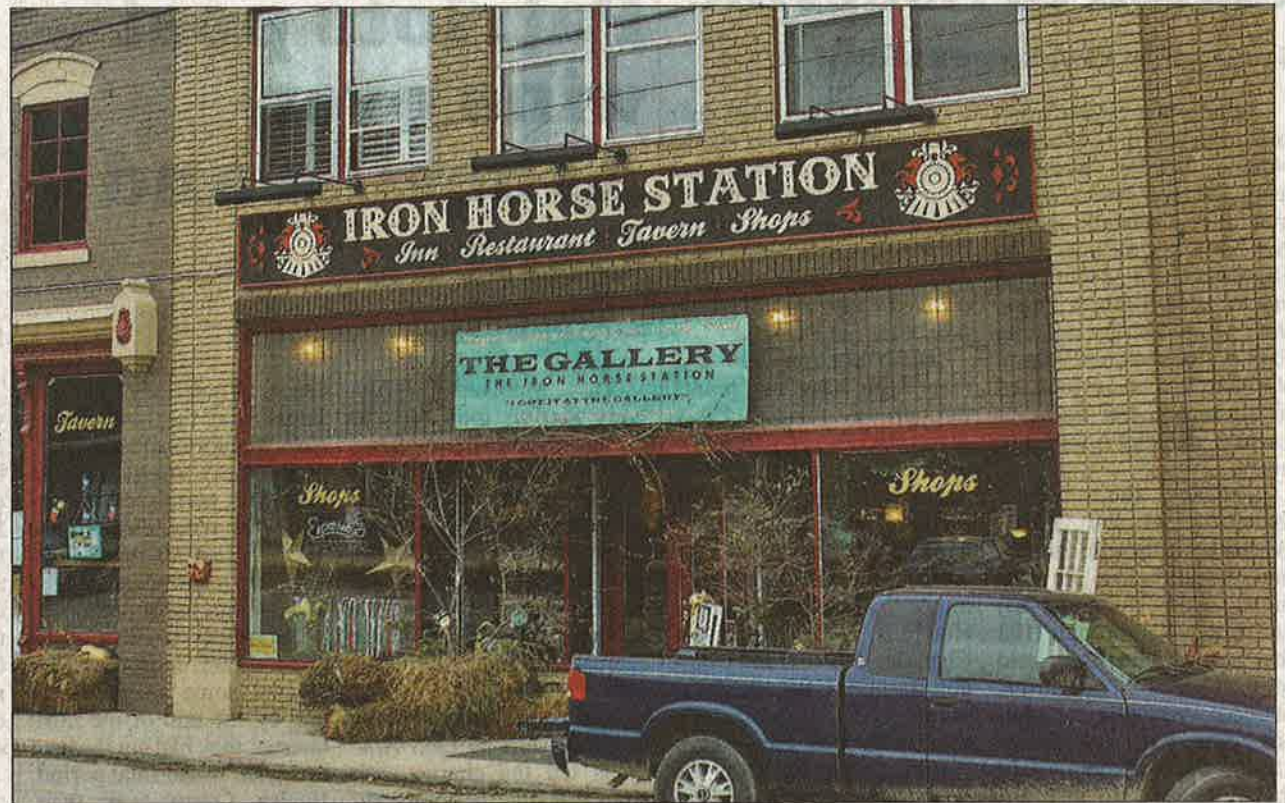


Photo by Melissa Dean

Springs and the inn.

"They were looking to find a place to stay everywhere around Marshall, but I think Asheville was not discreet enough," said Natichioni. "The first night (the crew) stayed, we had a big open mic night and after that night, they came back the next day with Franco and just decided to stay the whole time."

Franco, who burst into the film scene in the late 90s, achieved international fame with his portrayal of Harry Osborn in the *Spider-man* trilogy.

In 2008, Franco showed the world a very different side with his comedic role in *Pineapple Express* and more recently, nominated for a Golden Globe for his portrayal of Aron Ralston in *127 Days*.

Franco is also set to co-host the 2011 Oscars alongside Anne Hathaway.

"I feel like he is really at his peek right now," said Natichioni. "He has so much charisma and seems to be a very serious actor in the way that he studies and his approach to acting. He just seems very astute and educated."

Franco is no stranger to the North Carolina Mountains; he has previously been enrolled at Warren Wilson College in the poetry program.

Natichioni said that during their stay, the crew were "very hard workers," leaving the inn by 7:30 every morning to film at an unknown farm in Marshall and not returning until after 9 p.m. every night. But of course, they did leave the bar open late each night for them to come and enjoy some Hot Springs nightlife.

"They were all really funny," said Caitlyn Loflin, who served them for the New Years Eve bash at the inn. "James seemed kind-of quiet, but he asked me where I was from and about our town. I thought it was funny because everyone else was drinking, but he had a Diet Coke and a cheeseburger."

Natichioni said during their stay, although the inn is equipped with large rooms, some fitted with personal Jacuzzi tubs, Franco opted to stay in one of the more modest rooms because he loved the view of the train tracks and the mountains.

"He just felt right at home there," said Natichioni. "But the room really does have the nicest view in the building."

Although the crew did not reveal much about work they were doing or if they plan to return to Marshall for further filming, Natichioni said that they may be back next summer.

And with Franco's parting words, "I love this place," Hot Springs and the inn may once again turn Hollywood.