

An Ordinary Kid With Extraordinary Dreams

Colonia Native Turned Hollywood Star

By George Manzella

Beat cop, detective, firefighter, doorman, or lover. You name it, Jimmy Palumbo has played it. The Colonia native has had key roles on television shows like Friends, ER, Entourage, Desperate Housewives, Law and Order, Boardwalk Empire, and many more. He has graced the big screen with Robert De Niro, Tommy Lee Jones, Michelle Pfeiffer, Ralph Macchio, and Artie Lange. But, despite his fame and hectic lifestyle he has remained true to his roots.

Palumbo grew up in Colonia and graduated from Colonia High School in 1983 where he was captain of the tennis team and voted 'Most Talkative' by his peers. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism from Rutgers University in 1987 and started working as a substitute teacher for Woodbridge Township School District. The prolific actor lived in Colonia until he was 40 but spent time in New York City and Los Angeles to bolster his career before settling in Ramsey, NJ with his wife and daughter.

During a recent visit to his alma mater, Palumbo spoke to an intimate group of theater and film students about his life and career while revealing juicy secrets of show business. The students enjoyed his story about a time when he received a residual check for \$0.00. His reenactment of the conversation that he had with the bank teller had the students rolling in laughter.



Despite his Hollywood success, Palumbo still considers himself an ordinary Jersey boy who got lucky.

"I got lucky," said Palumbo. "I had so little experience...it was life changing."

Palumbo's career in showbiz was unintentional. Three life-changing events in the span of six months paved his way. He was working in a computer store in Princeton when he met a woman named Mary. After talking for a while, Mary found Palumbo funny and invited him to be a part of a variety show that she was directing at a coffee house in Princeton. He accepted a role in "Pancakes from hell" and received a positive review in a local newspaper. Feeling good about himself, he auditioned for community theater where he landed the lead role in "Play it again Sam". Then, he and his best friend from Colonia, Mike Ruane shot a short film called "Shoebox Blues" and held a huge screening in a backyard shown on a sheet tacked to a wall.

Fast forward 23 years and Jimmy Palumbo is sharing the screen with Robert De Niro, Tommy

Lee Jones, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Dianna Agron in Luc Besson's film *The Family*. Palumbo plays an FBI agent assigned to protect a snitch mafia couple (De Niro and Pfeiffer) and their kids who have been relocated from Brooklyn to France. Palumbo traveled to Paris and Normandy, France last year where he spent six weeks filming.

"*The Family* was a thrill of a lifetime," said Palumbo. "We stayed on Besson's estate and I ate dinner with De Niro, Pfeiffer, and Tommy Lee Jones every night. It was surreal. They were very kind to me and wonderful to be with and act with."

Palumbo's lead role in the 2006 cult-hit movie, *Beer League* was his first big gig. He played

alongside funnyman, Artie Lange as the crude softball star Johnny Trinno, a role written specifically for Palumbo. Palumbo, an avid softball player, still plays in a Woodbridge beer league with a group



of guys from Colonia every Wednesday for Corona Construction, a team his father started in 1967.

"For Beer League, the role was written for me," said Palumbo. "I still play softball every Wednesday in Woodbridge for my dad's company. We are getting older now, but we still make the playoffs."

Palumbo's life as an actor hasn't been all glitz and glamour; in fact the ride has been quite bumpy.

"It has been a wild ride...a lot of ups and downs...23 years, eking out a living some years and doing great in other years. It has been a long, long road," he said. "I went on 103 professional

auditions and struck out on every one. I thought it was over until one of my agents told me to hang in there and he was right."

With over 65 film and TV credits and hundreds of auditions, Palumbo still feels nervous and excited during his auditions.

"I always get excited about each audition," he said. "When there is a big audition there is tension, anxiety, dreaming, all of that."

A few of Palumbo's favorite gigs are *Beer League*, *The Family*, *Friends*, *ER* and *Curb your Enthusiasm*, but his most memorable spot is a sketch show he did for NBC called "Live on Tape".

According to him, "it put me on the map".

Palumbo also does voice overs, TV commercials and stand-up comedy. He is currently undertaking some exciting projects. He

has booked a few days on the CBS show *Unforgettable* and he is starring alongside Morgan Freeman and Diane Keaton in the upcoming film, *Life Itself*. He will also be in a future episode of the TV series *Orange is the New Black*. Plus, he plays the referee in the current *Pappa John's* commercials with Peyton Manning.

This Jersey boy has traveled the world and played many different roles but his roots have grown so deep in the New Jersey soil that he will forever be known as the beer league softball player from Colonia who was born to make people laugh.