

That a Film Happening in the Backyard?

SO you wanna be a movie producer but can't afford the multimillionaire entrance fee?

Do what electronic-security expert **Barry Sisson** and Woodson High grad **Marc Lieberman** have done—start a production company built on a financing structure that would make industry executives blanch.

Having completed its first feature, Sisson and Lieberman's Fairfax company is trying to position itself as a serious indie player. Forget the one or two deep-pocketed angels who usually back independent movies; Cavalier Films has turned to local doctors, lawyers, real-estate agents, an economist or two, a retiree, and a full-time mom, among many others, to underwrite the company's work.

Not only do "ordinary people," as Sisson says, get a shot at investing in film with a relatively low amount (\$25,000 minimum), they can also take part in the production process—within limits.

Bill Ackerman, retired after a career with the United Way of the National Capital Area, says he's done plenty of traditional investing and was looking for something different. Fellow investor **Diane Naughton** of Oakton got to use her skills as homemaker and mother while shooting was under way for Cavalier's debut picture, *Familiar Strangers*, a family drama made with pro actors, director, and principal crew.

"I made sure the actors got their coffee every morning; I took them to hair, makeup,

and wardrobe; and I made sure they were on the set on time," she says. "I had so much fun, I'm ready to do it again."

The fact that investors can get involved at all makes industry types say to Sisson, "Are you crazy?"

Even crazier, perhaps, is the fact that investments in Cavalier are set for three years; unlike in Hollywood, there's a definite date for repayment, assuming the movie makes money. If profits roll in before that date, they're paid out immediately, Sisson says.

Sisson and Lieberman hope *Familiar Strangers* will get



Sisson and Lieberman got movie money from doctors and brokers.

picked up for distribution via festival screenings; they've submitted the movie for consideration at Sundance. It could happen: *The Station Agent*, which Sisson cofinanced before starting Cavalier, was bought at Sundance by Miramax.

—WILLIAM TRIPLETT