

Direction Home

He may have grown up in nearby Highlands but if home is where the heart is, then director Kevin Smith's heart beats pure Red Bank. Just walk through town and you're bound to find a bunch of kids hanging out at the local comic book store, Jay and Silent Bob's Secret Stash. That's Smith's. Or take in the popular "Vulgarthon" film festival which brings cinemaphiles from all over the tri-state area to celebrate all that's different. That's Smith's creation, too. But Smith didn't just boost the film culture through screenings—*Chasing Amy*, which may very well be his most critically acclaimed work, was shot on location, including using the upstairs of Jack's Music Shoppe, a landmark onto itself, as the apartment of the main character.

NJM: What is it about Red Bank that won you over?

Smith: Red Bank is the cradle of civilization, man. For me, Riverview Hospital was where I was born and then 29 years later had my kid there. *Chasing Amy* was set there, so it delivered to me and kept delivering. I grew up in nearby Highland, but most days we just went to Jack's record store—used to be a McDonald's—and a Chinese food joint called Brown's. Sold Star Wars figures years later over there and it became my home base.

NJM: You've really helped the film community grow there. What's your favorite part of that been?

Smith: Netflix did this Roadshow series and we were showing *Clerks* in Leonardo on an inflatable screen in an empty lot across from the Quik Stop (the setting of *Clerks*). The town fathers put the kibosh on it right near the show date because they didn't want an unruly crowd. So, last minute, we begged Red Bank for help and Pat Muna and Mr. McKenna said have it in Marina Park. That became a location for 3000 people and we had to turn away another 1,000. What a great day!

NJM: What were some of the things you learned to love about the town when you lived in Red Bank?

Smith: Lived in Red Bank from '94 to 2002 and people were always really sweet to us. They constantly do that Rockin' With The Oldies car show every few months and have the big Christmas tree lighting. Good schools like the catholic school on St. James, great place to raise a kid. The beautiful scenic views by the water are just amazing. It's also multi-cultural—not just about white people, but black folks and the Mexican community thrive. Not interested in being a part of a white mecca. Red Bank is also somewhat historical in terms of jazz and the war effort. What's now the Galleria was a manufacturing plant for parachutes in World War II. Plus, the train station can get you into Manhattan in like five minutes.

NJM: How did Ben Affleck and the gang like Red Bank when you were shooting *Chasing Amy*?

Smith: They loved it so much that both Jason Lee and Ben have been back on shoots since. Jason absolutely lived by Red Bank pizza! Those guys lived in a condo in Tower Hill condominiums...the shoot for *Chasing Amy* was four weeks and when it was done you could see they were going to miss the place.

NJM: How about you? What do you miss most about Red Bank now that you don't live there?

Smith: Two weeks ago, I was back there, it was about one in the morning and I'm at the Secret Stash (Smith's comic book store) playing poker. I went to get a cigarette, so I step onto Broad Street and, I mean, not a single car. Peace and solitude, that's what it was. I stay in my house out here in L.A. and hardly step outside. But when I go back to Red Bank...now that's like going home.