

Awards keep coming for comedy producer

By GIA MILLER

Imagine winning awards for spending your days with comedy's "It Girl" Amy Schumer. Katonah resident Steven Ast gets to do just that.

Last year, Mr. Ast won his first Emmy and Peabody as an executive producer on the third season of "Inside Amy Schumer." This Sunday, he will attend the Creative Arts Emmy Awards, and on Sept. 18 he will attend the 68th Primetime Emmy Awards, both as a nominee for his roles as an executive producer on "Amy Schumer: Live at the Apollo" and season four of "Inside Amy Schumer," respectively.

Mr. Ast didn't set out to be a television producer. As a double major in political science and history and a minor in math from SUNY Binghamton, he wanted to become a lawyer. But those dreams quickly vanished after an internship helped him realize he could not fix a broken system. So, he chose to pursue his passion for film and enrolled in several courses at New York University and The New School while taking on a series of internships.

Mr. Ast got coffee and read scripts at Deborah Schindler Production in Manhattan, and worked on the set for several low-budget, independent feature films, before landing his first paying jobs where he explored photography, lighting and grip work. This helped him develop a broad understanding of what it takes to make a film come to life.

Finally, after a brief stint in the garment industry, Mr. Ast got his big break.

"I constantly hustled and put out cold cover letters to every TV and film studio in town, even with my limited experience," explained Mr. Ast. "Eventually, I landed a freelance job for an MTV event, called, 'The Sports & Music Festival.'"

After six months, MTV hired Mr. Ast full time. Even though he wanted to work in film, he enjoyed television; it gave him the opportunity to travel and work on a variety of projects, such as events, documentaries, promotions and even television shows. His last assignment at MTV was on "The Andy Milonakis Show," which led him to a job on the debut season of "Human Giant" where his career in comedy took off.

After "Human Giant" ended, Jon Glaser, a writer on the show, hired Mr. Ast to produce his new series, "Delocated."

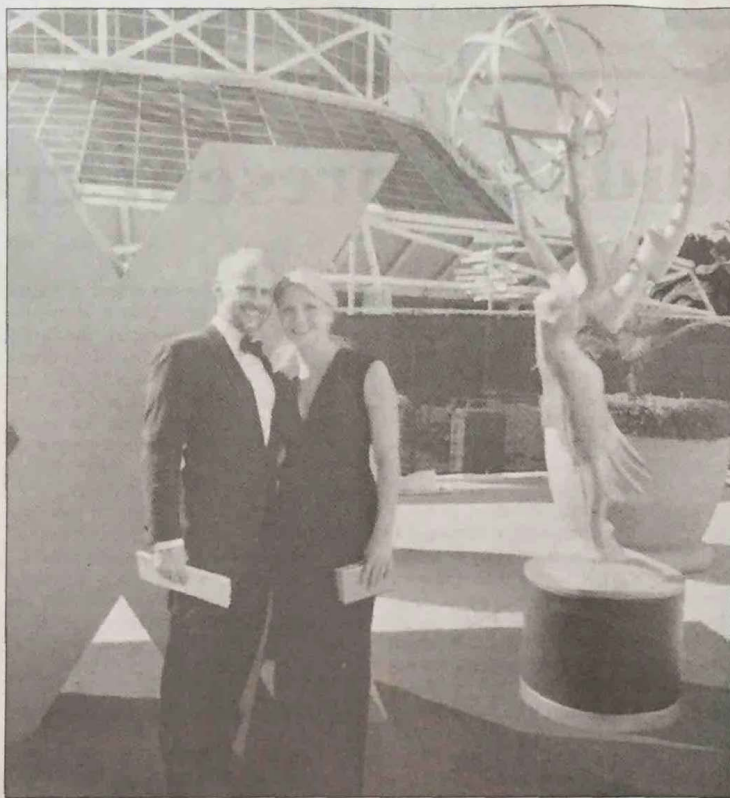


PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVEN AST

Steven and Becky Ast of Katonah at the 2015 Emmy Awards ceremony.

During season three, Mr. Ast met Amy Schumer, who had a small, yet recurring role, and they hit it off. When Ms. Schumer landed a show with Comedy Central, she asked Mr. Ast to join her on the pilot.

As an executive producer, Mr. Ast is the first one in and the last one out, in charge of pre-production, filming and post-production. He works exclusively on "Inside Amy Schumer" from October to May, putting in 12 to 14 hour days the majority of the time. Throughout the years, he has watched the show gain popularity.

"When we made the first season, Amy wasn't that well-known," explained Mr. Ast. "But the show was well received, and we got a second season. After that season, and her movie 'Train Wreck,' her fame skyrocketed. By the third season, she was a celebrity. The

writing got stronger and became more meaningful and poignant. I'd like to think we created our strongest material at that time."

On May 31, 2015, Ms. Schumer accepted a Peabody Award for the third season of their show. Out of approximately 4,000 submissions, the board unanimously chose only 30 winners, and surprisingly, their show was on that list.

"This award is for media excellence," said Mr. Ast. "Drama shows like 'The Americans' or ' Fargo' won awards, along with a slew of serious documentaries on issues like Ebola or the impact of ISIS, and then, in the middle of this hard journalism was our show. It was an incredible honor that they believed we were doing something creatively that felt significant and had substance. Having the Peabody Award is a con-

stant reminder that we are doing things that aren't just to make people laugh, but also to make people think."

Even with a Peabody, Mr. Ast was surprised that the show received an Emmy nomination, and he was certain they would not win, especially since they were up against the 40th season of "Saturday Night Live." When they won, he was shocked.

"The whole thing was surreal," said Mr. Ast. "It's just so odd to walk around with the Emmy and have random people congratulate you."

This year, the award season will be more chaotic for Mr. Ast. He's currently working on a pilot for a show called "Storytime" and, as luck would have it, the pilot will shoot the week between the two awards, forcing him and his wife, Becky, to make the cross-country trip twice in order to meet the demands of his busy schedule.

But he balances his hectic life with the peaceful town of Katonah, which he and his wife moved to in April 2012 because they "fell in love with its unique charm and classic American sensibility" and wanted to raise their children, 5-year-old Evan and 3-year-old Emily, in a small-town setting that placed a high value on education but was still close enough to commute to Manhattan.

Mr. Ast has made Katonah as much a part of his day as his life on the set of his shows. An avid runner, he enjoys waving to neighbors who are out walking their dogs, strolling with their kids or gardening as he passes by, helping to reinforce the close-knit community he loves about this town. And he has his morning coffee at the Reading Room, where he preps for jobs or catches up with owner, Pete Menzies, who is a friend and former TV producer.

On the weekends, his family has carved out several traditions: Friday dinners at Purdy's Farmer & the Fish; Saturday mornings at John Jay Homestead's farm market for local produce, kombucha and delicious baked goods; and weekend brunch at Bedford Post. Katonah is their home, and Mr. Ast feels blessed.

"Every day when I come home to Katonah, I look up at the sky, take a deep, full breath of fresh air and gaze at the stars," he says. "This serves as a daily reminder, a meditation, on how lucky I am to be living with my beautiful family in such an amazing place."