Tara Heston plays the lead female role in "The Watermen," a feature-length film that is yet to be released in the United States.

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**UW-Stout alumna takes shot at stardom**

By UW-Stout News Bureau

MENOMONIE — When Tara Heston came to UW-Stout to major in retail merchandising and management, her goal was to someday open her own women's fashion clothing store.

She still is committed to that dream but has put it on hold because an even bigger one has taken precedent. These days Heston is putting all her energy into acting in Hollywood.
The 2006 UW-Stout graduate was the lead actress in a 2011 independent feature-length film, "The Watermen."

She also recently became a member of the prestigious Screen Actors Guild.

"There are a lot of exciting things happening. When you become part of SAG, you're playing with the big dogs," Heston said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles, where she lives. "Since joining SAG I've gotten better agents and better films. It's been going really well for me."

"The Watermen," an action-thriller, hasn't been released in the U.S. Heston spent two months in Newport News, Va., where it was filmed in 2010.

It since has been bought by Lionsgate Films.

Heston plays "Diane," one of a group of young men and women on a stranded boat abducted by sadistic men in another vessel. The men want to grind up the young people to use their flesh as fishing bait.

"I learned a ton from 'The Watermen,' " Heston said about her first starring role. "I worked with some really good actors on that. Reviews were mixed."

"The Watermen" opened doors to other work in commercials, short films and guest appearances. She plays the lead actress in three short films: "Twisted," a dark comedy that premiered Friday in Los Angeles; "Unusual Victim," a dark comedy that could become a feature film; and "Love Advice," a romantic comedy that is in production.

And on Sept. 8, she wrote on her Facebook page, facebook.com/taraheston1: "Excited to say that I will be showing my dance moves on the upcoming film 'Love Advice' to a fabulous singer/songwriter from the UK."

A slender brunette with big blue-green eyes, she knows her striking looks are important to her success, but also she will have to work for everything she gets.

"I tend to believe my acting is a huge part of it. A lot of people think it's really easy if you're pretty, but you're not going to succeed if you're not working on your acting. I'm constantly working on my acting," said Heston, who has shed her Minnesota accent and has an acting coach.
"I'm very determined and persistent with making sure things happen. If I meet someone, I always follow up," she added.

Jean Heston of Frazee, Minn., wouldn't bet against her daughter someday realizing her dream of becoming a famous actress.

"When she has something on her mind, she can do it. I knew she would do something big. She's done it on her own," Jean Heston said.

Tara Heston grew up in Frazee, in north-central Minnesota, about an hour east of Fargo, N.D. She started modeling at age 14, often making the four-hour trip with her parents to Minneapolis.

"I made a plan when I was really young that becoming a model would help get me into acting. My whole goal was to become an actress," Heston said.

She was accepted into a California fashion school but also was recruited to play basketball at UW-Stout. She liked UW-Stout's retail merchandising and management program and decided to stay closer to home.

"I didn't feel I was ready for California," she said.

Heston ended up not playing on the Blue Devils basketball team but focused on school, concentrating on fashion marketing and buying and product management.

"It's exactly what I was looking for. ... I thought Stout was a great, great school for fashion," she said.

While at UW-Stout, Heston worked at the student-run retail store, The Niche, worked part time in the Office of International Education, played intramural basketball and landed a co-op job through the university at The Buckle in Ridgedale Center in Minnetonka, Minn.

She continued modeling in Chicago and Minneapolis but did not try out for any university plays.

After graduating she went to the Twin Cities for two years. She became an assistant manager at The Buckle and made progress with her acting career, doing commercials, short films and her first feature-length flick, "A Dark Return."

Eventually, she attracted the attention of agents, leading her to move to California.
Her next goal is to get into another feature film as a lead, she said.

Heston also is a lingerie model for Frederick's of Hollywood.

If her career continues to ascend, she could envision herself opening a retail store in five to seven years, finally realizing her other dream and putting her UW-Stout degree to work.

"I always thought it would be fun to have a fan base and open a store. Then you're almost guaranteed success. I thought of all this when I was really little. That's really crazy. It's an exciting time for me," she said.