The Coast Star
PEOPLE

Belmar's Sernio, an up & coming actor, pursues his passion with persistence

Charm, sharp wit, good looks and, let's face it, even raw, natural talent cannot guarantee an actor a successful career in the competitive world of show business these days. Many actors find the auditioning process to be downright brutal, with rejection a day-to-day reality.

Which is why no matter how handsome, charismatic or endearing an actor is, his success often depends solely on his perseverance to perfect and practice his craft. Perseverance, in the end, can ultimately make or break a career.

Joseph Sernio, 28, of Belmar — an up-and-coming actor who has starred in independent films, televisions shows, soap operas and numerous commercial spots, knows a thing or two about perseverance.

According to Mr. Sernio's friends, family and colleagues, he is one of the most driven, determined and dedicated actors in the business today.

His drive is what puts him ahead of the game, and that drive, many believe, will skyrocket him to stardom.

"He is such a wonderful person that his light shines through," Diane Raver, founder of the Garden State Film Festival, recently said of Mr. Sernio. "That is what star quality really is."

"He is very talented, and he's a wonderful person — and, in this business, that can be a rare commodity," she added.

Mr. Sernio's drive to succeed as an actor was first fueled by the death of his father, the late Joseph Sernio, who passed away from pancreatic cancer five years ago. His father was only 45 years old.

His father's death forced him, in many ways, to re-evaluate his life and his direction.

It was during this time that Mr. Sernio's dream of becoming an actor was fully realized.

Mr. Sernio's father, a dedicated husband and father who possessed a strong work ethic, always pushed his son to follow his dreams, no matter who or what tried to stand in his way.

He also taught him another especially important lesson – "to be really smart" about his career choices, Mr. Sernio said.

Mr. Sernio would have made his father proud. He does "smart" very well. He remembered to keep his day job.

Mr. Sernio's income does not rely solely on his acting career. Instead, he has managed to utilize the certificates he earned in both computer technical support and computer networking from The Chubb Institute to maintain a steady paycheck, which has, in turn, allowed him to exercise more freedom in picking and choosing the roles he wants to play, while leaving himself open to enjoying his craft.

Mr. Sernio works as a freelance photographic designer and Web site designer for *Currents Magazine*, which is based out of Shrewsbury.

He recently finished filming "The Roadhouse," an independent film produced by Lightning Films, in which he plays the male lead, Joe Nuzzo.

"The Roadhouse" — which is scheduled to be shown in numerous film festivals over the course of the next six months and will likely be distributed through Amazon.com shortly after — tells the story of Joe and Michelle Nuzzo, the female lead played by Monica Knight, who ultimately find themselves celebrating their one-year wedding anniversary stranded in a decrepit motel in upstate New York.

The film follows the couple as they embark on the six-hour journey to attend Joe's father's funeral and the car troubles they encounter along the way.

"The Roadhouse" focuses on the ways in which the couple, already at their wit's end, try to make do with the odd people they encounter at the motel.

JOSEPH J. DELCONZO, The Coast Star

Joseph Sernio, 28, an actor full of promise and passion for his craft, has virtually gone under the radar in his hometown of Belmar for the last few years. His reoccurring role on "All My Children" and his new film, "The Roadhouse," may just change that.

Story by Kelly Skellinger

"The Roadhouse" has already been shown at independent film festivals in Italy and France.

Nick Pavano, owner of Lightning Films and writer/director of "The Roadhouse," pointed out that the screenplay was adapted from a short story Mr. Sernio's friend had written.

Mr. Sernio presented Mr. Pavano with the three-page short story when Mr. Sernio was working with Mr. Pavano on an earlier film, "Repetition of Change."

Mr. Pavano subsequently turned the three-page short story into a 75-page screenplay.

"The film was written for him," Mr. Pavano said of writing the part for Mr. Sernio. "I wrote the part [of Joe Nuzzo] with Joe completely in mind."

Mr. Sernio's dedication to his craft is what Mr. Pavano said sets Mr. Sernio apart from other actors.

"It is his overall involvement with the process," Mr. Pavano said. "He is not just an actor who shows up on set, reads his lines and goes home. He really absorbs the script. He really does his research. He really wants to have a say. He is really involved and incredibly dedicated.

"That, to any director, is really important," Mr. Pavano said.

With his time freed up from filming "The Roadhouse," Mr. Sernio is now concentrating on a role he landed on ABC's "All My Children," in which he plays an intensive care unit hospital orderly.

Mr. Sernio's acting resume is lengthy for a man his age.

The face of Wall Township's Bentley Diamond since 2006, he has been featured in numerous television commercials and print advertisements for the company.

Mr. Sernio has also managed to star in such films as "Pawns Gambit," "I Am You," "Repetition of Change" and "Spinning Into Butter."

He played the lead role of George Allen Smith on an episode of "Haunting Evidence," and has also been featured on such television shows as CBS's "Rescue Me," "As The World Turns" and "Love Monkey," as well as ABC's "Hope and Faith."

Mr. Sernio has also starred in commercials for Red Lobster, L'Oreal, Popeye's Chicken, Verizon Wireless and Bentley Diamond, among others.

There are many perks to working a day job and pursuing a passion on the side, Mr. Sernio said. However, with a promising acting career in the works, scheduling can become grueling at times, he added.

"I'm always doing something," Mr. Sernio said of his current weekly routine, which includes marketing and self-promotion, his freelance work with *Currents Magazine*, his role on "All My Children," his work with Bentley Diamond, other readings and auditions for upcoming films, shows and commercials, and the time he allots to giving back to his community through local cancer foundation fund-raisers.

"It is non-stop," Mr. Sernio said of his schedule. "It's definitely not easy. It's very tiring. But, hopefully, one day, it will all pay off."

Mr. Sernio grew up in Jersey City with his mother, Toni Sernio, now of Jackson, his late father, Joseph, and his two sisters, Nicole, 26, and Kayla, 20, now both of Jackson.

He attended PS No. 27, in Jersey City, up until seventh grade, when his family moved to Howell. He graduated from the Southard School, in Howell, in 1994 and Howell High School in 1998. His family moved to Jackson a few years later.

He also graduated from a one-year program at The Chubb Institute with certificates in computer technical support and computer networking in 2000.

Mr. Sernio's mother fondly recalled the days of her son's childhood.

"He was always a husky little kid who liked to ride around on his bike," she said. "He was also very much into taking things apart and putting them back together."

Mrs. Sernio recalled her son's football days, in which he played defensive tackle for the Howell Rebels during his freshman year of high school.

Mr. Sernio's football days were short-lived, however. He quit after the first year, after which he started hanging out with friends who played in local bands.

Mrs. Sernio noted that as her son got older he learned to turn on the charm, weaseling his way out of detentions by winning his teachers over with Manhattan bagels.

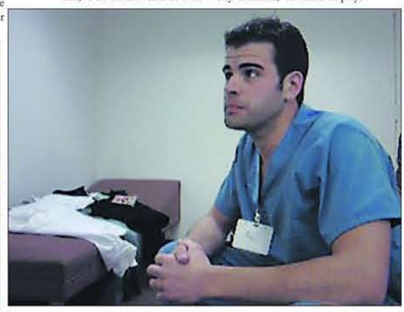
While Mr. Sernio learned to look out for himself over the course of his high school years, he also learned to look out for his sisters, as well, Mrs. Sernio said.

"He took care of his sisters," his mother said. "He was always looking out for his sisters, both then and now."

Mr. Sernio worked for The Tolly Group, a hardware testing company based out of Manasquan, where hardware was tested prior to it being released to the market. He worked as an administrator there shortly after graduating from The Chubb Institute.

Photo courtesy of Joseph Sernio

Joseph Sernio's family are genuinely supportive of his acting career. With his two sisters at his side, Nicole [left], 26, and Kayla [right], 20, Mr. Sernio attended a formal dinner for a film project he was working on.



> "He is like his dad. When you are down, he can definitely bring you up again."
>
> — Toni Sernio mother

> "He is as cute as a button. So prepare yourself."
>
> — Lori Draz Bentley Diamond Marketing

Photo courtesy of Joseph Sernio [center]
JOSEPH J. DELCONZO, The Coast Star [above]

Joseph Sernio [center] currently holds a recurring role as an ICU orderly on ABC's "All My Children." Mr. Sernio [above], in his Belmar apartment, displayed the promotional poster for his new film, "The Roadhouse," in which he plays the lead male role. "The Roadhouse" is scheduled to be featured at The Garden State Film Festival, in Asbury Park, this spring.

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When his father died, Mr. Sernio took over his father's share of the 455 Restaurant, Bar and Lounge, located in Jersey City. Mr. Sernio's father had a 25 percent stake in the business.

Offered a position in New York City as a software engineer for Marc Echo Enterprises, Mr. Sernio split his time between working as a software engineer and working at the restaurant.

Mr. Sernio landed his present job at Currents Magazine in 2007.

Mr. Sernio moved to Belmar shortly after his father passed away. He has lived in the borough for five years now.

It was shortly after his father died that Mr. Sernio decided to do some soul searching. While he had always admired actors and enjoyed watching actors perform, he never really had the guts to pursue his passion.

His father's death provided him with the push he needed to realize his dream.

"After years of thinking about it, I think it took the death of my father to realize, "Life is so short. It's time to just do what I want to do," Mr. Sernio said.

He started by taking acting classes at The Ted Bardy Studio for Dramatic Arts, in New York City.

He would then work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. as a software engineer for Marc Echo Enterprises, attend acting school from 6 to 9 p.m. and then help run the restaurant on his free time.

Mr. Sernio soon learned that networking was key to starting an acting career and would attend Vinnie's Night Out, a small networking party for actors which was held every Tuesday evening in the city.

He would soon befriend Vinny Vella, who starred in "The Sopranos" and "Casino," Lilo Brancata, who starred in "A Bronx Tale," and numerous other artists and agents in the area.

"It was a shock," Mrs. Sernio said of her son's decision to pursue a career in acting.

"After his dad died, he kind of separated himself from his family and his best friends," she said. "A couple of weeks went by and he called and said he was in a Ted Bardy Studio acting class. For the past seven to eight years, he has put his whole know-how into it."

"He always looks to his dad as being the push he needed to take a chance in life," Mrs. Sernio added. "Sometimes you have to lose everything to get what you want."

Over the years, Mr. Sernio has had numerous acting coaches, such as Bob McAndrew and Lisa Regina. Many know him best from being featured in *STUFF Magazine's* "The Real Goodfellas" article, which became a national print ad.

Mr. Sernio, underneath it all, is just an average Joe. Despite his budding career, he remains grounded, humble and, above all else, realistic about his career.

Lori Draz, who handles marketing and advertising for Bentley Diamond, in Wall, may just be one of Mr. Sernio's biggest fans.

"He is not just a pretty face," Ms. Draz said. "He is a smart fella."

"He is extremely devoted and passionate and loyal to his craft," she added. "He's just a good guy. He is good to his friends, good to his family."

"He stays completely focused on self promotion without ever being egotistical about it," Ms. Draz noted. "When he is successful, he makes a point of thanking everyone who helped him become successful. He thinks of it as a team effort."

"He's the kind of guy that you just say, 'I hope it happens for this guy,'" she said.

Mr. Sernio has learned to use his celebrity for good, donating his time to several local cancer foundations such as The Ashley Lauren Foundation and The American Cancer Foundation. He also donates his time to The Arthritis Foundation, from time to time, and other non-profit organizations when his schedule allows.

Monica Vermeulen, founder and executive director of The Ashley Lauren Foundation, has worked one on one with Mr. Sernio during fund-raisers for the foundation.

The foundation, which provides assistance to New Jersey children living with cancer, really hit home for Mr. Sernio, whose father battled the disease.

Mr. Sernio has made appearances at fund-raisers and directly provided assistance to families affected by cancer on numerous occasions, Mrs. Vermeulen said.

One year, Mr. Sernio even purchased a Christmas tree and holiday decorations for a family whose child was battling the disease, Mrs. Vermeulen added.

"He goes above and beyond," she said. "He always tries to spread the word about the foundation. He is a great advocate for us."

"You can truly tell he has great compassion for these children and what they are going through," Mrs. Vermeulen said. "Perhaps some other people in the profession would make an appearance, but Joe goes above and beyond."

Mrs. Vermeulen pointed out that Mr. Sernio has time and scheduling restraints, which many people would use as excuses to not donate their time to organizations such as hers.

However, Mr. Sernio never lets a scheduling conflict get in the way of helping out others, she said.

"Anytime I need him, he is always there," she said. "He makes time in his schedule."

By setting one goal each day to better his career, Mr. Sernio hopes to make it in the uber competitive world of show business.

And if he doesn't, he will be satisfied having just enjoyed the ride.

Mrs. Sernio's son once told her, "If I don't get that far, at least I am having fun."

"That's all that matters," Mrs. Sernio said. "You have to have fun doing it. He's not doing it for the money. He's doing it for the thrill of it."

Fans can nominate Mr, Sernio for the Garden State Film Festival's Robert Pastorelli Rising Star Award. Those interested in nominating him for the award can visit www.lightning-films.net or Mr. Sernio's Web site at www.JoeSernio.com.

The Garden State Film Festival will run from April 3 to April 5, in Asbury Park. "The Roadhouse" is scheduled to be shown there.

Anyone interested in learning more about Mr. Sernio and his work can visit his Web site at www.JoeSernio.com or his myspace page at www.Myspace.com/JoeSernio.